

For more information contact:

Cary Hatcher
Manager of Member Relations
Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, Inc.
(334) 944-7115 -- FAX (334) 588-0683
E-mail: wec@wiregrass.coop

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Wiregrass Electric sponsors area students to Montgomery Youth Tour

Concepts such as representative government, civil rights history, and the complexities of the electric utility industry can be difficult for high school students to grasp. Thanks to the annual Youth Tour, sponsored by the Alabama Rural Electric Association (AREA) and electric cooperatives throughout Alabama like Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, 150 students across the state had an opportunity to see these concepts in action first-hand.

The last week in March, Wiregrass Electric Cooperative sponsored 10 high school juniors from its service area to attend the Youth Tour in Montgomery. Those participating were: Kassidy Williams, Lona Hallford, Tanesha Reeves and Brittany Richardson from Cottonwood High; Madison Hendrix and Nathan Justice from Geneva County High in Hartford; Aaron McDaniels from Geneva High; Noah Justice from Slocumb High; Ethan Lee from Pathway Christian; and Kyle Singletary from Ashford Academy. .

“Youth Tour not only exposes these students to the workings of their state government,” said Cary Hatcher, manager of member relations for WEC, “it also helps them better understand the impact rural electrification has on our region and state.”

Students visited with State Representatives Donnie Chesteen, Bobby Moore and Paul Lee and Senator Harri Anne Smith. The tour included the Capitol and Rosa Parks Museum, and the students worked in time for leadership training and fellowship with their peers from other parts of the state.

“I was so excited to shake Sen. Harri Anne Smith’s hand and enjoyed getting to talk with her,” said Lonna Hallford. “Hearing about all the issues and bills they are dealing with gave us insight into government.”

”I enjoyed touring the Capitol because of the educational and historical value,” added Kassidy Williams. “It was fun to see the actual places that we have learned about in school.”

A popular part of the conference among the students was a talk given by Cea Cohen-Elliott, a professional motivational speaker, wellness and fitness coach who uses humor to connect with her audience. “Cea Cohen- Elliott’s talk was my favorite part,” said Madison Hendrix, “because she is so energetic and she related to us really well.”

“What I will take away from the conference,” said Noah Justice, “is Cea’s message to be myself and not let others influence me.”

Ethan Lee and Kyle Singletary also took home a message from the popular speaker. “To enjoy what I do,” Ethan said, and Kyle added, “to refuse to be a victim of others.”

“My favorite part of Youth Tour was pretty much everything,” said Tanesha Reeves, “but most definitely meeting new people and making friends.”

“Wiregrass Electric believes giving something back to the community is part of the purpose of a cooperative,” said Michael McWaters, Wiregrass Electric CEO. “By taking students to see the state and national seats of power, students see how important it is to learn about the political process and to interact with government leaders. They can walk away from a tour as a better leader and with a sense that one person can make a difference.”

Two students from this group will be selected by an independent interview process to participate in the NRECA National Washington Youth Tour in June.

Wiregrass Electric Cooperative is a fast growing electric distribution system, with more than 3,500 miles of line providing reliable energy to over 22,000 homes and businesses in Houston, Geneva, Covington, Dale and Coffee counties. For more information, visit their Website at www.wiregrass.coop.

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Youth Tour participants from the Wiregrass region had the opportunity to visit with their State Representatives: Rep. Barry Moore, District 91; Rep. Paul Lee, District 86; Noah Justice; Tanesha Reeves; Kyle Singletary; Kassidy Williams; Brittany Richardson; Madison Hendrix; Lona Hallford; Nathan Justice; Aaron McDaniels; Ethan Lee; and Rep. Donnie Chesteen, District 87.