

TEXAS YOUTH TOUR MAGAZINE 2016

# YOUR



TAKE THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME — FROM AUSTIN TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

## Change your life today!

INSIDE: ALUMNI IN LOVE | COMMUNITY LEADERS | CO-OP CAREERS | VOICES OF THE REUNION

# YOUR YOUTH TOUR



**EVERY YEAR, GOVERNMENT-IN-ACTION YOUTH TOUR** participants come home to Texas excited about all their new friends. Youth Tour emphasizes lessons in American government, history and culture, and the experience helps each participant understand how electric cooperatives make a difference in the world. But meeting people is just as important.

Over 100 future leaders sponsored by Texas cooperatives join more than 1,700 other high school students from across the country on what many call the trip of a lifetime. They meet electric cooperative leaders, as well as chaperones from various walks of life. They also meet their congressional representatives and legislative staff in Washington, D.C.

The relationships formed on the trip often lead to lifetime friendships, and job and internship opportunities. Several Youth Tour alumni highlighted in this issue used their Youth Tour connections and newfound knowledge of the electric industry to land jobs at electric cooperatives. Co-op jobs offer many of our future leaders the chance to work for organizations that make a difference in peoples' lives, stay in their hometowns with family and friends, and advance in meaningful careers. Other alumni, featured in this year's profiles, credit Youth Tour with influencing their career choices outside of co-ops—in politics, writing and business.

This issue's history article brings the story of electric cooperatives to life via two alumni who told the tale of rural electrification through a man who remembers when the lights came on. It also shows how co-ops' purpose to improve the quality of their members' lives is just as relevant today as it was decades ago when co-ops were founded.

When Lyndon B. Johnson gave the speech in 1957 that inspired Youth Tour, he recommended that electric cooperatives send youngsters to see "what the American flag stands for and represents." As the stories about Youth Tour in this issue show, the program does that—and so much more.

Best Regards,

Mike Williams  
President/CEO  
Texas Electric Cooperatives



**VISIT THE LINCOLN  
MEMORIAL**



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**FOLLOW** Texas Government-in-Action  
Youth Tour on YouTube

### YOUR TOUR | TEXAS YOUTH TOUR

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**COVER:** At the White House are 2015 Youth Tour participants, from left: Elizabeth Dougherty, Lamar County EC; Jacob Smith, Lyntegar EC; Jessica Rodriguez, Wharton County EC; Tanner Vargas, Southwest Rural EC; Rebecca Moore, Houston County EC; DeJuan Miller, Upshur Rural EC; and Brooklyne Oliveira, United Cooperative Services.

COVER PHOTOS: TEC

# PLAY TO WIN THE TRIP

OBJECTIVE: To win an all-expenses-paid leadership

GOVERNMENT-  
IN-ACTION

# YOUTH TOUR

Ready, set,  
**GO!**

**FIND** your  
co-op on the  
Texas Youth



**TOUR**  
Washington,  
D.C.

Go to **AUSTIN**

VISIT TEXAS STATE CAPITOL AND  
BULLOCK TEXAS STATE HISTORY  
MUSEUM | MEET 125 TEXAS WINNERS

VISIT ...

U.S. Capitol



Smithsonian Institution



U.S. Representatives



National Mall



1,700+ New



# OF A LIFETIME from your electric co-op

trip to Washington, D.C., make friends and create memories that last a lifetime

electric  
map via  
Tour.com



## APPLY for your co-op's contest



ENTRIES MAY INCLUDE AN ESSAY |  
SPEECH | VIDEO | INTERVIEW

ALSO APPLY FOR WREATH-LAYING CEREMONY  
AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL FOR MORE  
LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

WAIT  
FOR  
IT ...

## GET READY for the trip of a lifetime



MEET FRIENDS FROM ALL OVER THE U.S. |  
TRY TO WIN A SCHOLARSHIP

# WIN!



TELL US ABOUT YOUR YOUTH TOUR!  
[FACEBOOK.COM/TEXASYOUTHTOURALUMNI](https://www.facebook.com/TexasYouthTourAlumni)  
OR [YOUTHTOUR@TEXAS-EC.ORG](mailto:YOUTHTOUR@TEXAS-EC.ORG)

## Go back to your CO-OP



EXPLORE CAREERS | GET EDUCATION |  
GET INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY  
AND COOPERATIVE | TELL A FRIEND



# Finish. Wait! START your next adventure.

Friends

TEXAS ROTUNDA: DAVID ANDREW GILDER | DOLLAR PHOTO CLUB - U.S. CAPITOL: BIG DOG | DOLLAR PHOTO CLUB - YOUTH TOUR: TEC

# YOUR CONNECTIONS

**FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOUTH TOUR** Nearly everyone falls in love with the Government-in-Action Youth Tour, but falling in love because of it also happens every once upon a time.

Finding love is not the intended purpose behind attending the cooperative-sponsored Youth Tour; instead, the program is designed to expose high school students to the wonders of Washington, D.C. The adventure can be life-changing, often inspiring education and career choices. For these three couples, Youth Tour changed their lives ever after. **BY SUZANNE HALKO**

**YOUTH TOUR CHANGED THE LIFE OF RYAN FRANKLIN** in a way he didn't expect when Navasota Valley Electric Cooperative sent him to Washington in 2000.

Then a high school senior from Donie, Ryan describes the trip as his "*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* moment," referring to the 1939 movie about a naïve man appointed to the U.S. Senate.

Ryan says Youth Tour made him realize how big the world was and gave him a deeper connection to U.S. heritage.

"I certainly never would have imagined at that time that I would meet my wife there," he says.

Ryan didn't even imagine it when he met the girl who would become his wife. He says he didn't know

what to think of Ashley Irwin from Canyon, sponsored by Swisher EC, and she was just as disinterested.

"It was total repulsion," Ashley says of their first encounters. "He was very shy, and he had this real thick East Texas accent ... I thought he was kind of a hick, and he thought I was snobby."

Still, because they both planned to attend West Texas A&M University that fall, Ashley gave Ryan her contact information so they could connect in college. He never called.

At the university, however, Ryan's and Ashley's common interests put them in the same classes and extracurricular activities. Their constant interaction combined with their shared experience of Youth Tour helped them become good friends until, "It just switched over," Ashley says, "and we didn't want to be apart."

They were married in 2004 and remained together in every-

thing they did afterward, pursuing graduate studies at Baylor University and starting a family.

Youth Tour "opened the door to us being friends, becoming more than friends and getting married, and now we have kid-dos [Eva, 6, and Nolan, 4]," Ryan says, "and it was really kind of powerful in that way."

Ryan is the associate commissioner for educator leadership and quality at the Texas Education Agency; Ashley is an appellate attorney who is taking a break from practicing law to raise their children.

**CATHIE PARSLEY AND GARY FUCHS** went on Youth Tour in 1975 but didn't meet for another 16 years.

From Shallowater, Cathie earned South Plains EC's sponsorship by winning a speech contest. "Having to give a speech, as we did for my experience with

the competition, gave me confidence about speaking in front of people. I could do it and be reasonably decent at it," she says. "And it came to serve me very well in the career that I chose, which is law."

Cathie graduated from law school at Texas Tech University in 1981 and followed her career to the Texas Legislature, where she worked for a



Ryan and Ashley Franklin family



Cathie Parsley and Gary Fuchs

**"We are both so grateful how we would have met"**



## DID YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH YOUTH TOUR?

### TELL US YOUR STORY.

Email [youthtour@texas-ec.org](mailto:youthtour@texas-ec.org)  
or post on [Facebook.com/TexasYouthTourAlumni](https://www.facebook.com/TexasYouthTourAlumni)

senator during the 1991 session. There, she met and started dating Gary.

One night, as they pored over photos Gary took in high school, a picture of President Gerald Ford in the White House Rose Garden caught Cathie's eye. She recognized the distinctive tie Ford was wearing that day.

"It turns out Gary had been in the Rose Garden in the same gathering that I had for Youth Tour," she says.

Gary also went on Youth Tour in 1975, sponsored by Choptank EC in his home state of Maryland. Because Youth Tour is a nationwide program, students from all over the country attended that same event.

"All those years later, we recognized that we had been at the same place at the same time and didn't know it," Cathie says. "We got married in 1993 and are still married. It was an interesting coincidence that we found each other."

Cathie is the chief administrative law judge at Texas' State Office of Administrative Hearings.

**NEITHER WAS IT LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT** for 2005 participants Kaelyn McPherson and Benjamin Seth King. Kaelyn was from Blum, a member of HILCO EC and sponsored by Brazos Electric Power Cooperative; and Seth was from Stephenville, sponsored by United Cooperative Services.

"Both of us will agree that it was not like 'Hey, I am going to fall in love with this person,'" Kaelyn says, explaining that she



President Gerald Ford's tie led two alumni to realize they went on Youth Tour the same year.

was not impressed when she first saw him tossing a football around a hotel pool.

Each focused on the experience as individuals. For Kaelyn, associating with ambitious teenagers outside of her hometown confirmed that it was normal to have aspirations. For Seth, who wanted to join the military, seeing the Declaration of Independence, war memorials and the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum reaffirmed his duty to country. The trip was also his first time flying on an airplane.

"My family would never have had the money or the means to take us to Washington, D.C., although I'm sure they would have loved to," Seth says. "So getting to do the trip was huge for me."

Seth and Kaelyn's relationship changed after Youth Tour when the two started texting, talking and going to each other's sporting events as high school juniors. About two years later, they had their first kiss then started dating three months before college. Seth went to the U.S. Military Academy in New York, and Kaelyn went to Texas Woman's University to study nursing. They both graduated in 2011 and got married the same year.

Seth is an Army captain and Apache helicopter pilot who served in Afghanistan. Kaelyn has worked as a nurse and is now a full-time mom to their son, Aden.

Seth and Kaelyn King family



CHERRY BLOSSOMS: KISA MARKIZA | DOLLAR PHOTO CLUB. HEADSHOTS: COURTESY SUBJECTS. TIE: COURTESY CATHIE PARSELEY

for the trip. ... I don't know otherwise."

—KAELYN (MCPHERSON) KING | HILCO EC | 2005

# YOUR MEMORIES

**NOTABLE ALUMNI** Whether it's the relationships formed, government processes witnessed or stirring scenes beheld, the Government-in-Action Youth Tour impacts the lives of its travelers. From state politician to acclaimed children's author to internationally renowned interior designer, alumni over the past five decades have cited the Youth Tour experience as a positive influence on their success. **BY CHRIS BURROWS**



**REP. BROOKS LANDGRAF | RIO GRANDE**

**EC | 1998** Seventeen years after Brooks Landgraf visited the Capitol Hill office of his U.S. representative while on Youth Tour and became enamored with public service, he stood before the 84th

Texas Legislature to present House Resolution 2553. The motion recognized 50 years of Texas electric cooperatives' participation in Youth Tour.

"I'm proud to say I'm one of them," he told his fellow lawmakers on May 20, 2015, as he presented the resolution. "In fact, that was one of my first experiences with public service."

A native of the Odessa area served by Rio Grande EC, Landgraf entered the co-op essay contest during his junior year at Permian High School and won a spot on the tour. He says he was fascinated by the trip to Washington, D.C., which helped push him toward a career in politics.

"Youth Tour was one of the first opportunities for me as a young kid from rural Texas to experience the func-

tions of government and how government should be responsive to the needs of the people it serves," he says.

Landgraf attended Texas A&M University and obtained his law degree from St. Mary's University in San Antonio. Since then, he's worked as a West Texas attorney and has served as the state representative for District 81 since 2014.

"The most rewarding part of the job is being able to serve a state and a region that has provided so much opportunity for me over the years," he says.

Long before he was meeting with voters as a state figure, young Landgraf was on Youth Tour meeting peers from across Texas and U.S. Rep. Larry Combest.

"I enjoyed making friends with kids from across the state but also getting to learn about rural electrification issues through the lens of government," he says.

During the presentation of H.R. 2553, Landgraf recognized Texas electric cooperatives and Youth Tour "for providing this remarkable opportunity to future leaders of the Lone Star State." **READ MORE PROFILES ON PAGE 10**

**"I made friends and gained the experience"**

Kimber Walterscheid of Cooke County EC  
and Christina Santosa of CoServ visit  
national monuments in 2015.



**VISIT THE NATIONAL  
MALL MONUMENTS**

**SEE YOUTH TOUR HONORED  
ON TEXAS HOUSE FLOOR**  
[tinyurl.com/HR4YT](http://tinyurl.com/HR4YT)



YOUTH TOUR: TEC HEADSHOTS: COURTESY SUBJECTS

**that I will cherish for a lifetime.”**

—RYLEA SELF | SOUTHWEST TEXAS EC | 2014

# YOUR MEMORIES

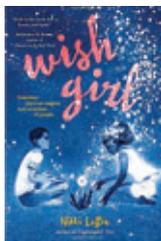


**NIKKI LOFTIN | PEDERNALES EC | 1989** When Nikki Loftin was in high school, she wrote every chance she could. Every scholarship essay that came across her desk was a chance to flex her writing chops and maybe win money for college. So when her parents signed up to receive power from Pedernales EC and another chance to write appeared for the co-op's Youth Tour essay contest, she gave it a shot.

"It was a writing contest about electrical safety, and I actually did research into ground-fault circuit interrupters," Loftin says of the essay that won her a ticket to Washington, "and I had no idea that they even existed before that."

These days, Loftin is still writing nonstop—but now for much larger audiences and with much greater impact. She's an author of books and short fiction for youths, drawing inspiration from her upbringing in rural Hayes County. Loftin's books, translated and read around the world, combine real-life themes and the supernatural.

"They are about kids who are faced with difficulties, whether it's poverty or illness, and how they overcome that with friendship, learning to find their own way or gain the courage to do what needs to be done," she says. "All my books deal with heavier themes, but when you add the magic in, it makes it lighter for young readers."



Loftin has traveled as far away as Japan to speak to students about her books, such as *Wish Girl* (Razorbill/Penguin, 2015), and is inspired by being able to engage with readers via mail, email and Skype.

"A lot of the questions I get are along the lines of, 'What happened to the characters after [the book ends]?' as if they're real people, which is such a compliment because that means the story became real for them," she says. "It gives me energy to keep going."

Before Loftin's writing earned her the hearts of young readers, it earned her a trip to Washington, D.C., for Youth Tour, a trip that she says changed her life and that she hopes her two sons will consider when they're the right age. Loftin lives near Dripping Springs and is a member of Pedernales EC.

"When you take a group of kids up to a place like Washington, D.C., and just open it all up before them, it's such a significant thing for young people, especially when you're experiencing it with other young people who are open to it," she says. "Anytime that smart, focused and engaged kids can come together and learn about anything, it's going to be good, but this is particularly important."

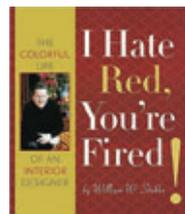


**BILL STUBBS | WHARTON COUNTY EC | 1969** Bill Stubbs has spent decades traversing the globe designing luxury interiors, speaking to crowds and hosting a TV show that aired internationally. Through these experiences, he has become accustomed to meeting new people, learning about new places and traveling long distances.

But he had to start somewhere, and Youth Tour provided him that start—and a spark.

"It broadened my horizons so much that it really was a fork in the road to the way my life turned out," Stubbs says.

As a youth in Co-op Country, career options at the time seemed limited to Stubbs, whose father, Frank Stubbs, was general manager at Wharton County Electric Cooperative.



"I was not a particularly good student," Stubbs says of his time at El Campo High School, "but I was good at art and things like that. When you're in a small town in Texas, and you're not very good academically, you don't realize that art can become a career."

That outlook started to change on Youth Tour. In addition to visiting the White House and getting to meet U.S. Rep. J.J. Pickle at his Capitol Hill office, Stubbs recalls the "paradigm shift" that the community of other Texas youths and the total experience caused for him.

For college, Stubbs looked beyond the Texas universities that he thought he "was destined" to attend and applied to design schools around the country. He started down the path toward becoming a renowned interior designer when he went to the International Institute of Interior Design, now part of Marymount University, in Arlington, Virginia.

Since Youth Tour, Stubbs hasn't stopped expanding his horizons. His interior design firm, William W. Stubbs & Associates, spearheads projects across the globe. From Kiev to Moscow, London and Hawaii, his design work has earned him a spot among *Architectural Digest's* list of the 100 top interior designers and architects in the world. His autobiography, *I Hate Red, You're Fired!* (Harry N. Abrams, 2004), led to speaking engagements and the debut of the internationally syndicated PBS TV series, *Moment of Luxury*.

Stubbs, who lives in Houston, still is designing and makes regular TV appearances in the Houston area and nationwide. He's earned many accolades during his career, but he still hasn't forgotten the prize of Youth Tour that sparked his identity.

"It just gave me a sense of place, and it encouraged me to go for whatever I wanted to go for," he says. "It broadened my horizon to reach a little bigger and go a little further."

## HAVE AN ALUMNI EXPERIENCE TO SHARE?

Email [youthtour@texas-ec.org](mailto:youthtour@texas-ec.org)  
or post on [Facebook.com/TexasYouthTourAlumni](https://www.facebook.com/TexasYouthTourAlumni)

Maria Gonzales of Guadalupe Valley EC and Sam Middleton of Swisher EC light candles in the National Cathedral in 2015.



VISIT THE NATIONAL CATHEDRAL



**“We were humbled together in front of those monuments. We laughed and cried together.”**

—MICHAELA GARDNER | HOUSTON COUNTY EC | 2014



# YOUR NETWORK

## YOUTH TOUR ALUMNI FIND MEANINGFUL CAREERS VIA CO-OPS BY SUZANNE HALKO



**AT FIRST, MEAGAN (JOHNSON) BROWN** didn't want to apply for the Government-in-Action Youth Tour. Her mom, Mary Johnson, an 18-year Comanche Electric Cooperative employee, kept insisting.

Eventually, Brown saw the value of Youth Tour—a free trip to Washington, D.C., plus an education about American co-ops, government and history—and won Comanche EC's sponsorship in 2011. The trip broadened her horizons and led to lasting friendships and life-changing opportunities.

"It gave her more pride in what rural electric co-ops do for people," Johnson says.

Because of Youth Tour, Brown met General Manager Kerry Kelton of Mid-South Synergy. "He said, 'When you come down to go to [Texas A&M University], give us a call. We will probably find a place for you,'" Brown recalls.

She interned with Mid-South and learned more about co-ops. "At a lot of large companies, you're just another employee," she says. "With a co-op, it's like a family."

Her Mid-South family also became her actual family when she married Jacob Brown, who still works in the co-op's accounting department.

"We laughed when they started seeing each other," Johnson says. "We were like, 'Well, you're keeping it in the family, huh?' because everybody works at the electric co-op."

After getting an agricultural communications and journalism degree in 2014, Brown used her co-op experience to land a job with Bryan Texas Utilities, also a member of Texas Electric Cooperatives. Later she became an executive assistant with the City of Bryan.

As her mom says, "She has lived the co-op life."

U.S. CAPITOL: ANDREW KRI | DOLLAR PHOTO CLUB. HEADSHOTS: COURTESY SUBJECTS





**LIKE BROWN, SCOTT MEURER** heard about Youth Tour from his mother, Rosie Meurer, who’s a career employee of Central Texas EC in Fredericksburg. Meurer went on Youth Tour in 2000.

“After seeing all of the memorials of those who have done service for our country,” says Meurer, a Pedernales EC member, “it helped inspire me to want to work in an environment where we provide service to folks and hopefully improve folks’ quality of life.”

Meurer earned an environmental science degree from McMurry University in Abilene and was working in San Antonio when he heard about an opening at TEC. Because of Youth Tour and his mom’s career, he knew about the statewide trade association’s service to electric co-ops and their members.

“It was really cool ... just growing up in that co-op environment and then to go and work with one and be a member,” Meurer says.

Meurer started at TEC in 2007, serving with the inside sales team and then in supply chain sourcing. Now, as a supply chain analyst, Meurer evaluates member cooperatives’ warehouse supplies and processes to ensure that they have the best inventory to serve their members.

“I’m glad it’s worked out this way,” Meurer says, “because there is no place better to work, that’s for sure.”



**YOUTH TOUR ALSO LAUNCHED** Erin (Bischoff) Hughes’ co-op career. In 2006, as a high school senior from Anderson, she won a Mid-South video contest, earning sponsorship to Washington, as well as a scholarship and an internship.

The internship turned into the job she kept while getting a degree in sociology from Sam Houston State University. She graduated in 2011.

“I’ve been here ever since,” she says. “It’s a different environment. They really care about their employees and their members.”

Hughes is now Mid-South’s Youth Tour coordinator and the executive assistant to the co-op’s general manager. In her job, she ushers students through an experience similar to her own, helping prepare the next generation for real-world work. She says Youth Tour participants make useful co-op interns because they have knowledge of what a co-op is and have proved their willingness to work by competing in the contest to win the trip.

Youth Tour “really opened the door for me at Mid-South, which has been amazing,” Hughes says, explaining that her co-op job offers fulfilling career opportunities and allows her to live where she wants. “I really like the small-town feel. I love to travel, but I like coming home more.”



**“At a lot of large companies, you’re just another employee. With a co-op, it’s like a family.”**

—MEAGAN (JOHNSON) BROWN | COMANCHE EC | 2011



# YOUR JOURNEY

## CLASSIC TALE OF RURAL ELECTRIFICATION ALWAYS A WINNER

Decades apart, students win Youth Tour trip by humanizing co-op history **BY CHRIS BURROWS**

**THE 78-FOOT-TALL BRONZE STATUE** depicting six servicemen struggling to plant an American flag at Iwo Jima is a powerful sight for any Washington, D.C., visitor.

When Laura (Arnold) Mullin saw the Marine Corps War Memorial during her Government-in-Action Youth Tour trip in 1972, the effect was particularly poignant. “To stand there and look at that ... and picture it coming alive, it had such an impact on me,” she said.

The monument brought American history to life for Mullin, and it was that fascination with the past that took her to Washington in the first place. When she heard Swisher Electric Cooperatives’ call for speeches about electricity to earn a Youth Tour trip, Mullin, who grew up in Silverton, turned to history and someone who lived through the effort to get rural power.

“When you speak about an event in history, you have to first speak about the people,” she said. “It’s they who caused the event.”

Mullin’s father, the late Fred Arnold, was a teenager in the 1940s when the local co-op strung a power line out to his family’s farm. As with so many families of the era, the arrival of electricity changed their way of life dramatically. As they discussed his experience, Mullin was struck by what her father experienced in life without electricity, which was difficult for her to imagine.

“It was exciting for them, but it was also a costly venture,” Mullin said. “They’re thinking, ‘All of a sudden, we have to spend money on electricity.’ It changed the way they did a lot of things.”

Her speech on the topic put a human face to the trials that farmers and communities endured before electricity improved their quality of life. The theme resonated with the contest’s judges, who selected her for the trip.

“Other kids were talking about numbers and statistics and how electricity works,” she said. “I was showing the change from his perspective. I asked him, ‘You didn’t have a refrigerator? What did you have?’ ”

Arnold’s perspective was no less striking 41 years later when high school junior Cody Daugherty sat down with him in 2013 to research his Swisher EC Youth Tour speech, which earned him the trip to D.C.



Cody Daugherty

“He had so many stories,” Daugherty said, explaining how Arnold invited him in and offered him a sandwich. “I could have stayed there all day. He said they had some sort of windmill that would generate their power before they had electricity, and

they would use that to power an icebox. He said it was one of the neatest things.”

Just as sculptor Felix W. de Weldon’s bronze statue illustrates the struggle of American history for Mullin and millions of other Washington visitors, stories like Arnold’s continue to bring the history of co-ops to life for Mullin, Daugherty and other Youth Tour attendees.

“To me,” Mullin said, “everything was all about making something in history come alive.”

### HAVE A YOUTH TOUR SUCCESS STORY FROM YOUR CO-OP?

Email [youthtour@texas-ec.org](mailto:youthtour@texas-ec.org)  
or post on [Facebook.com/TexasYouthTourAlumni](https://www.facebook.com/TexasYouthTourAlumni)



**VISIT THE MARINE CORPS WAR MEMORIAL**



Four 2015 Youth Tour participants lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, from left: Michael Torres, Lyntegar EC; Makenna Brewer, South Plains EC; Kristin Vire, Fayette EC; and Jackson Harbison, South Plains EC.



VISIT THE TOMB OF  
THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER



**“To me, everything was all about making something in history come alive.”**

—LAURA (ARNOLD) MULLIN | SWISHER EC | 1972

# YOUR VOICES



**GRATITUDE, CAMARADERIE AND INSPIRATION** were the sentiments of the hundreds of past and present Government-in-Action Youth Tour participants who attended the Texas Youth Tour 50th Anniversary Celebration and Reunion Dinner on June 10, 2015, in Austin.

In their own words, here is what alumni who attended the reunion had to say about Youth Tour, electric cooperatives and life after the trip.

**“SOMETHING I ENJOYED** the most [about the reunion] was getting to reunite with the kids I went on Youth Tour with—the ones I had a connection with—because we had our lives changed together.”

—MICHAELA GARDNER | HOUSTON COUNTY EC | 2014

**“I MADE FRIENDS** for a lifetime and gained the experience that I will cherish for a lifetime. I have also found a newfound appreciation for Texas as a state.”

—RYLEA SELF | SOUTHWEST TEXAS EC | 2014

**“IN ADDITION TO** meeting my future wife, the Youth Tour helped foster a deeper appreciation for our freedoms and inspired a career in public service.”

—RYAN FRANKLIN | NAVASOTA VALLEY EC | 2000

**I WAS VERY YOUNG** when I went, and I had not really traveled far from home by myself before. I knew no one on the trip, and it really taught me to be tolerant of others and be humble and act with kindness always.”

—DEIDRA NIXON | HAMILTON COUNTY EC | 1995

**“THE MONUMENTS** and buildings were amazing for this country girl from McAdoo—population 50–75 people. The books I had read and pictures in them came to life. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity of traveling to D.C. (by bus) and becoming one big Texas family.”

—SHARON FOX PEACOCK | DICKENS COUNTY EC | 1973

**“THE YOUTH TOUR** gave me a bundle of memories that I still have today. I gained confidence in myself as a result of the people I met on the trip and [found] that I actually could leave my rural life to see my government in action.”

—DONNA COX SANDERS | COMANCHE EC | 1970

**“OH, MY GOODNESS,** it was the greatest experience of my lifetime! We saw our great government buildings, congressmen, memorials and met such sweet folks. We were treated with such kindness and respect and gave it back in return!”

—LOIS (NEUMANN) TYMRAK | MEDINA EC | 1969

Rachel Raabe, sponsored by Karnes EC in 2015

