Occasionally, as we walk through life we will cross paths with a younger member of society and know they are going to do great things in their lifetime. They will make something of themselves, and make the world a better place. Fortunately, at Richland Electric we have had more than a few pass through our doors. The latest being 18-year-old Jocelyn Parker. Jocelyn is the daughter of Mark and Rachel Parker. She graduated from Kickapoo High School in 2016 and is a two-time attendee of Youth Leadership Congress. She is currently a freshman at the University of Wisconsin–Madison where she plans to major in communication arts or international relations with minors in business and French. Jocelyn was elected to represent Wisconsin at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) annual meeting in San Diego. We recently asked Jocelyn a few questions about her experiences and wanted to share her responses.

How did you first get involved with Richland Electric Cooperative and Youth Leadership Congress? What were your expectations?

My first involvement with Richland Electric was when I sang the National Anthem at the annual meeting in 2014. The summer of that year was the first time I attended the Youth Leadership Congress in River Falls. It was the first time I remember learning about cooperatives and the seven cooperative principles. I heard about the opportunity when I was asked by an acquaintance of my parents if I was interested in a leadership camp, and if you know anything about me, you know I am not one to turn down opportunities. I had never attended a camp like that before and even though my parents and grandparents were involved with different cooperatives, I had no knowledge of what being a part of such an organization really meant.
You were elected to the Youth Leadership Congress board and then selected to represent the entire state of Wisconsin. What made you decide to pursue those positions? What were the criteria for applying for those positions?

That first year at YLC opened my eyes so much that I ended up asking to go back to the camp for a second summer. Besides the phenomenal public speakers and making so many new friends, I really wanted to return so that I could apply (and hopefully be selected) to be a member of the Youth Board. I wanted to be a part of this select group because it seemed like such an honor to have a real say in what the camp became in the year to follow—since the Youth Board coordinates with the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association (WECA) to help plan and run the event for the next year. Criteria to become a member of the Youth Board included an application, a petition with peer signatures, and interview. From there, the applicant pool was narrowed down and the final candidates had to give a short speech in front of all of the delegates, chaperones, and coordinators at the congress. Each delegate then voted for the final six members of the board. I was honored to be named one of those members.

Being selected to the Youth Board meant I would attend the Youth Tour in Washington D.C.—a week-long tour of our nation’s capital alongside 2,000 youth from around the country. At this event, I had the opportunity to apply to be the one student to represent all of Wisconsin on a Youth Leadership Council that takes one delegate from each participating state to become a national youth board, of sorts. The application process was a written application and an interview with adults who represent the WECA. You also had to be able to commit to a second trip to Washington D.C. in July and the trip to San Diego in February for the NRECA Annual Meeting.
I decided to pursue these positions because I firmly believe that there is nothing to lose and everything to gain. If I had not run for these positions, I still would have learned what I did at the Youth Leadership Congress in River Falls; however, if I had not decided to apply, then I would have missed out on so many opportunities, people, and events that have quite literally changed my life path.

The NRECA Annual Meeting in San Diego concluded at the beginning of March. You were able to attend that event representing Wisconsin. How was your trip? What was the most memorable experience while on the national board?

My trip to San Diego was amazing! My flights got a little messed up on the way there, but I got pretty good at killing time in airports and I did manage to get a lot of school work done. One of the best parts of San Diego was seeing all of my fellow Youth Leadership Council members again. After our council members-only trip to D.C. in July, we all got very close. Catching up was a blast! It is a lot like having a really great friend from each of the states that participate.

Another one of my favorite things at the annual meeting was when a meeting attendee would walk up to our group of 43 young adults in red polos and loudly ask, “Where is that young lady from Wisconsin!!?” It was such a fun privilege to get to say, “Here I am!” and shake hands and have a nice conversation about where each of us was from and maybe even take a picture together. Another exciting moment was when council members got to introduce themselves in front of the entire audience (about 6,000 people). Being the self-proclaimed comedian I am (and with the go-ahead from our supervisors to say something creative), I decided to introduce myself by saying “Hi, I’m Jocelyn Parker from Wisconsin, and let me tell you, It’s not easy… being cheesy.” I got quite a few laughs for that one.

You have obviously learned a lot about the cooperative world. What advice can you pass along to our younger generations based on your experiences?

Stop being afraid to love something that someone else thinks is “boring,” and never, ever turn down an opportunity to learn or grow. You cannot lose! The worst that can happen is that you learn something new. On the other hand, you could be introduced to something that literally changes your life.

I would like to extend a thank you to the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association for its support throughout my journey. I would also like to thank Richland Electric for always supporting students and giving them the tools to succeed. On a personal note, I would like to thank them for supporting me for the past few years as I traveled a total of three times to the Youth Leadership Council at River Falls (twice as a delegate and once as a board member), to Washington D.C., as a Youth Board member, and for all the other ways in which they chose to invest in my future. I am forever grateful for the opportunities I have been able to take advantage of, all because a local cooperative believed in me.

Best of luck to Jocelyn in her future endeavors. She is going to be a great leader and we are proud that she was able to grow up as a member of Richland Electric Cooperative.
BILLY GOAT BOB

Pa got a phone call. “Was wondering if you have room for a billy goat on the farm?” asked Uncle Bud. “Your boys would have fun with him. There’s also a harness and a cart, the whole works.”

Pa wasn’t too sure he wanted another animal on the farm but he relented. The next day, Ross Caves, the local cattle trucker, drove into the yard.

“Got a billy goat for you Herm,” Caves said. “His name is Bob.” The big white goat, with a white beard and two long curving horns, walked proudly down the truck ramp. When he reached the ground, he let out a big “Baaaaa,” his way of saying hello, I guessed.

“Bud said to tell you that you can just let the goat loose—he won’t run away.” Caves said.

We soon discovered that Bob had some bad habits. Ma put a fence around her flowers, which kept Bob away. But then he turned to Ma’s garden. Nobody messed with Ma’s garden. One noon she told Pa that she was gonna shoot Bob if she ever caught him in her garden again. It was an idle threat as Ma had never shot a gun in her life—but we all caught her message.

Pa was willing to put up with Bob’s shenanigans when they involved Ma, but not long after the garden incident, Pa and Bob got personally involved with each other. I was sitting on the porch, whittling on a stick and watching the goat out the corner of my eye. Pa said I should keep an eye on the goat whenever I could so he didn’t march back into Ma’s garden. Pa was bending over, weeding the asparagus patch in front of the pump house. Bob was eating grass on the lawn, behaving himself as he had done all day. But what the goat saw was apparently too good to pass by. Bob saw Pa all bent over with his rump up in the air. Bob put his head down so his horns were like two car bumpers and he galloped toward Pa, who didn’t hear him coming.

Whomp. I heard the sound clear as a bell. Pa went head over teakettle, dang near hitting the barnyard fence. It was quite the thing to see—I couldn’t help but burst out laughing.

Pa got up, looked at Bob, and commenced to cuss. I don’t recall when I’d heard a richer set of swear words coming out of Pa. He called the billy goat about every name I’d ever heard and lots I hadn’t. The goat stood looking at Pa, shaking his head from time to time. I suspected Bob had been called names before. I knew that if Pa’s shotgun had been handy, Bob would have been a goner.

Pa headed for the house. He walked right past me, not saying a word. He went directly to the phone and rang up Uncle Bud.

“You can come and get your dang goat,” Pa said. He was red in the face and breathing heavily.

The next day Ross Caves came for the goat and all of his equipment.

“Goat didn’t work out,” Ross said, grinning.

“Nope,” Pa said. Pa wasn’t grinning.

Go to www.Jerryapps.com for information about Jerry’s books and TV shows.

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