

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND at Youth Leadership Congress



By Trevor Clark, REC Director of Outreach Services

The winter months are seemingly coming to an end in Wisconsin, and there is no question that March came in like a lion. After a couple 40-50-degree days in early March, we were once again snapped back to reality with another Wisconsin snowstorm. It is just another way that Wisconsin keeps us honest and doesn't want us to get too far ahead of ourselves when it comes to spring and summer thoughts. But adults aren't the only ones thinking of nicer weather.

With nicer weather also comes the conclusion of the school year and probably most notably "senioritis." Seniors are finishing scholarship applications, applying to colleges, and filling out employment applications, as they know their life is about to drastically change. But they aren't the only ones waiting for the end of the year as now the juniors will become kings and queens of the schools, sophomores will become upperclassmen, and the freshmen, well, they are no longer freshmen.

For those students not graduating this year there is an opportunity for them to advance their skills this summer. They can guarantee a scholarship through Richland Electric Cooperative (REC) by attending Youth Leadership Congress (YLC), a two-and-a-half-day conference held at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. We realize that summer is summer and many students are busy with work, playing sports, or just enjoying their summers. Many students will not even want to think about doing more "school work" until actual school starts. But there are those who are always looking for new experiences and ways to improve their skills.



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Electric cooperatives throughout the state participate by sponsoring young adults who wish to enhance their teamwork and leadership skills at YLC. The name may be deceiving, but rest assured this is not a politically based conference. This is a great opportunity for students to see what makes the cooperative business model different and successful, then apply that knowledge to fun and challenging cooperative activities. They will learn how to develop their own leadership skills. The conference will usually host approximately 120 students from around the state. Students must be a member of a Wisconsin electric cooperative to attend the event.

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Students will arrive on campus with their sponsoring electric cooperative and be checked into their dorm. During check-in students receive their dorm key, meal card, a name tag with their assigned district, and they're assigned a roommate from a different cooperative. This is their first opportunity to meet someone new as they are not partnered with someone from their area. Boys and girls are housed in separate wings of the dormitory. From that moment on they are thrust into activities for the next few days beginning with a group orientation where they will meet the current Youth Board.

Students are divided into six districts with one youth board member and a couple of chaperones. This is the group the students will spend most of their time with. During their district meetings, students will discuss the creation of cooperatives and what they are about, as well as complete a couple of case studies amongst themselves.

Most of the time, however, students will be participating in team-building exercises, and there's entertainment each night. In recent years students have been entertained by a magician



to end the first night. The second night a dance is held, which students really enjoy!

On the second day students will be exposed to motivational speaker Craig Hillier. Hillier has spoken to over 2 million students in his career. He is engaging and upbeat while being 100 percent engaged with his audience. He doesn't pretend to have all the answers to all the issues teenagers face, but he does know how to keep them moving in a positive direction. He has been talking to young adults since 1990, and his desire to inspire students to exceed their potential has never wavered. Students will walk away from his program with a renewed sense of motivation.

Attending YLC gives students a unique opportunity to run for a "youth board." YLC teaches young adults about cooperatives and how the members are the owners. Campaigning for the youth board teaches students the value of being on a board. Should a student be elected to the youth board, he or she earns





the right to plan the following year's YLC. Youth Board members also have the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., for the Youth Tour. Students will visit museums, monuments, and talk with legislators elected from Wisconsin.

In order for students to run for the youth board they must acquire 10 signatures from their peers. Should they receive the required number of signatures, the students will then interview with a current youth board member of their district. The current youth board member will discuss with chaperones and select the two best candidates from their district. The two best candidates from each district will prepare a short speech to present to the entire Youth Leadership Congress. The congress will vote for six candidates to represent them on the Youth Board.

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It is highly recommended that students campaign for the youth board as this will teach them valuable lessons for the future. The most important lesson might be that students will have to publicly speak to their peers, which does not come naturally to many young adults. This also forces students to reach outside of their comfort zone by speaking to new people.

I was an attendee of YLC in the summer of 2004 and I remember how nervous I was. However, the nerves quickly went away upon arrival because I was so busy with activities. I have been fortunate enough to chaperone this event for REC for the last four years and it has been great being on the other side. I have noticed that most students will arrive at the REC offices before their trip, quiet and reserved. It is like pulling teeth to get them to have a conversation with you. But as the trip begins you can see students come out of their shell and have a great time. The ride home from YLC is much more talkative and energetic as they have surely made lifelong friends. I will often hear of students keeping in touch with each other following YLC, and it is a great thing to hear.

If you know of a student who might be interested in attend-

ing Youth Leadership Congress please fill out the form below and return it to the REC offices. Our goal is to provide this opportunity to as many students as we can. We feel this will help them immensely in their future endeavors. If students are not interested in those reasons, be sure to bring up the guaranteed scholarship from REC. **BB**

Youth Leadership Congress Participant Application Form

UW-River Falls • July 25-27, 2018

Name _____

Sponsoring cooperative _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Gender _____ Grade entering in fall 2017 _____

Age at the time of camp _____

Parent email _____
(used to send links to online health forms)

Please return to Richland Electric Cooperative, 1027 North Jefferson St., Richland Center



OUR ONE-ROOM COUNTRY SCHOOL

During my growing up years, Chain O' Lake one-room

country school was the center of our community. It was a place to learn, but it was also a gathering place. The Chain O' Lake School Board was made up of parents in the district. My dad served on the school board as treasurer for many years, even though my mother did most of the check writing and bookkeeping that was required.

People in the district were proud of their school. They supported the teacher, and it was not uncommon for the teacher to live with one of the families during the school year. We had teachers living with us for several years. People, whether they had children attending the school or not, attended school events, especially the Christmas program.

There was no hot lunch program. We carried our lunches to school in former Karo syrup pails or lard pails. A few kids had fancy lunch pails.

Arriving at school, we lined up the lunch pails on a shelf in the school's entryway where we hung our jackets, left our boots, and where an eighth-grader had piled a day's supply of wood for the ever hungry woodstove that struggled to keep us warm on cold winter days.

Ma made our lunches before we left each morning. They usually consisted of a couple jelly or peanut butter sandwiches, a cookie or two or maybe a piece of chocolate cake. In winter, many of us also brought along a jar of homemade vegetable soup, or chili or perhaps some casserole left over from the previous day. A pan of water sat on top of the woodstove to provide some humidity to the room, but it also warmed the jars of food that many of us brought from home. Our teacher always reminded us to loosen the covers on the jars so they wouldn't explode and make a mess. Our

teacher didn't like messes, but I often thought it would be interesting to experience an exploding glass jar of chili. It never happened.

I sometimes brought a jar of chocolate milk to school. I had prepared it at home by mixing Hershey chocolate syrup with milk. During recess, I would put my jar of soup or chili or whatever I had in the pan on top of the stove. And I would push my jar of chocolate milk into a snow bank near the school entrance. At lunchtime, I both had warm soup and cold milk. What more could one want?

Some of the more unfortunate kids had little in their lunch pails, perhaps a slice of bread or two smeared with lard. We ate our lunches together, outside on warm days, in the school room during the winter. We often traded food items—a piece of cake for an apple. A jelly sandwich for a sugar cookie. And we shared some of our lunch with those kids who had next to nothing in their lunch pails.

Excerpted from OLD FARM COUNTRY COOKBOOK (Wisconsin Historical Society Press).



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