



Richland Electric
Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative



Left to right: Macey Klebesadel, MacKenzie Couey, Cassidy Neefe, Mandi Fuller, Abi Luttig, Cassie Fuller, and Moriah Johll.

Seven young women attend YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONGRESS

In the early morning of July 13, 2016, seven young women embarked on a journey to the University of Wisconsin–River Falls to attend Youth Leadership Congress (YLC). These young women came from all regions of Richland County to attend the three-day event: Macey Klebesadel and MacKenzie Couey of Riverdale High School, Cassidy Neefe and Moriah Johll of Kickapoo High School, Cassie Fuller and Mandi Fuller of Reedsburg High School, and Abi Luttig of Richland Center High School.

For more than 50 years, YLC has been a premier youth program in Wisconsin. The University of Wisconsin–River Falls is a co-sponsor of this program with the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association (WECA). Participants stay in a campus residence hall and take part in activities across campus. Female and male participants and chaperones are housed on separate floors or wings. They are committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for participants. This unique structure gives both attendees and board members the opportunity to have fun while learning about cooperatives

and honing their leadership skills. It's also a wonderful chance to make lifelong friendships and connections.

The students convened with their Richland Electric Cooperative chaperone at the REC offices at approximately 7 a.m. They packed their passenger van and began their expedition to Oakdale Electric Cooperative, where they would rendezvous with students from other electric cooperatives before continuing onward. The beginning of the drive was a quiet ride as the young women were not acquainted with each other. There was some small chit-chat among girls who knew each other, but for



the most part it was a soundless ride.

The 56-passenger bus was filled with students from Oakdale, Scenic Rivers, Vernon, and Richland Electric Cooperatives. From Oakdale Electric they began their trek, stopping in Menomonie for lunch. Each student from REC was given money to eat at one of the surrounding fast food restaurants.

As the students arrived at the UWRF campus, you could assume by their look they were rather intimidated and unsure of what to expect the next three days. That look would rapidly alter as they were thrust into group activities. The students checked into their dorm room where they were randomly assigned a roommate from a different cooperative. This is done to ensure students will meet new people and be placed outside of their comfort zone.

After checking into their dorm rooms all students gathered at the University Center where they began a brief orientation about Youth Leadership Congress. This is also the first time students mingle with one another as they seek information on other students to complete a co-op bingo card.

Although YLC is a great event full of fun activities, students are required to participate in classroom activities where they learn more about cooperatives. The first of these classes is Co-ops 101 presented by Professor David Trechter. Trechter has had many experiences with

co-ops as he is the agriculture economics professor and department chair at UW–River Falls.

The first night ended with the students being entertained by a hypnotist, Dr. Al Snyder of Mondovi. This turned out to be a huge hit as many students were very willing to join him on stage. Students who chose not to accompany him on stage were able to get a great laugh.

Each one of these young women will receive a Richland Electric Cooperative Scholarship...

Thursday is the busiest day for the students as they begin breakfast in the commons. Following breakfast the students break off into their assigned districts to discuss the agenda for the day. A highlight for a lot of students is the hotline demonstration performed by Dunn Energy Cooperative.

A featured guest of YLC is motivational speaker Craig Hillier. He has been speaking at this conference for a number of years and always leaves the students

with a heightened sense of determination. Students will often have different faces during his presentation, from laughter to wonder, to sadness, back to laughter. He is able to connect with young adults on a level that most could never imagine. His presentation is full of activities that often make students use critical thinking in a way they actually enjoy.

Following Craig Hillier's presentation the students were allowed some brief free time. They took this opportunity to change into their dress clothes. The dress clothes are a requirement for students as they are educated on fine dining. The etiquette dinner is a great learning experience for students. They are served a three-course meal and are taught how to properly eat specific foods. Students are surprised how much effort goes into these types of banquets. However, after the etiquette dinner the students get the rest of the night off to attend a dance! The dance is very high energy, and it's a great way for the students to end their last night at UW–River Falls.

While attending YLC, students are encouraged to run for the youth board. The youth board is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for six students. A student selected to the youth board has the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., for eight days with the other members elected to represent their state. They meet federal legislators, tour the Smithsonian

museums and historical monuments, and attend political sessions based around cooperative topics. Throughout the year these six students communicate with WECA staff to plan the next year's Youth Leadership Congress.

All students receive a sign-up sheet in their welcome packet. If a student wishes to run for the youth board he or she must acquire 15 signatures from other students. The student then interviews with a current youth board member and chaperone. Two students are selected from each of six districts. Those students then present a two- to three-minute speech as to why they should be selected to the youth board. The selections are made solely by their peers!

“I really enjoyed any exercise involving teamwork.”

—YLC participant Macey Klebesadel

On the last day students decide who will be the new representatives on the youth board by voting for six delegates they would like to have represent them. The six students with the most votes are the new board members. The format is based on how electric cooperatives select their boards.

The students begin checking out of their dorm rooms around 11 a.m. and begin the last leg of their trip by head-



Left to right: Macey Klebesadel, MacKenzie Couey, Moriah Johl, Cassidy Neefe, Abi Luttig, Mandi Fuller, Cassie Fuller.

ing home. They arrive back at the REC offices on Friday, around 3 p.m.

When Amy Klebesadel was asked why she sent her daughter Macey to YLC, she stated, “First, knowing that she would receive a scholarship was the main focus, but as I learned more about it I wanted her to expand her knowledge and open up to more new things, to see more.”

When asked if she enjoyed her time at YLC, Macey responded, “Yeah, it was really fun. I enjoyed interacting with different people, finding out what they did and where they were from. I really enjoyed any exercise involving teamwork.”

Laurie Couey was also kind enough

to explain why she sent her daughter MacKenzie to YLC: “MacKenzie is very involved in her school and I saw this as an opportunity for her to build even more on her leadership skills and to meet new people.”

Each one of these young women will receive a Richland Electric Cooperative scholarship upon graduating by simply submitting their application. All other students who could not attend Youth Leadership Congress must submit an application as well as a 1,000–1,500-word essay, which will be reviewed by REC's scholarship committee. The topic of the essay is understanding the cooperative form of business and the student's personal experience with cooperatives. 8





FARM LIFE'S A CIRCLE

Harry Chapin's "All of Life's a Circle" is a song that resonated

with me the first time I heard it. That simple phrase is filled with meaning and so well fits the life that I led for many years, and in many ways I continue to live to this day.

Chapin could have easily sung "All of farming's a circle," for it surely is. Each sunrise welcomes a new beginning; each sunset celebrates the work of the day completed. Each day is the same with chores in the morning, work during the day and chores in the evening. But each day is different as well for some new joy, some new challenge usually appears.

Likewise each season welcomes a new round of work to be completed, each year the same, but each year different. On the small family farm where I grew up in the 1930s, '40s and early '50s, farm work was a circle of repetitions, dictated by the seasons. Spring was the beginning, when the crops were planted, summer meant caring for the crops, and autumn was harvest time, followed by a long, cold winter. It was a circle that repeated every year when I was growing up. I looked forward to the repetitions. I enjoyed spring, put up with summer, and marveled at autumn with the fall colors, the rush and hustle of the harvest, and the promise that winter was just around the corner, and the pace of farmwork would slow down and we could enjoy some time ice skating, skiing, and merely spending some time sitting by a cozy wood stove reading or listening to one of our favorite radio programs.

As the years passed, I continue to enjoy the repetitions of each day, and the expectations that came with each new season. And although surprises came my way, nearly every day and every season were sometimes less than pleasant, they added spice, and challenge to the circle.

As I think back to those days which sometimes seemed an endless, boring repetition of milking cows, cleaning

barns, making hay, threshing grain, and chopping wood in preparation for winter, I've come to appreciate how spending those first 16 years of my life experiencing the circle of farm life and its long days and predicated seasonal work has influenced my life and largely made me who I am today.

As the years pass, I continue to look forward to and enjoy the seasonal changes. I remember what my mother did—she started seeds in March, planted the garden in May, hoed and weeded the garden, as well as harvested its bounty in summer. She canned and preserved the vegetables and fruits in fall. And in late winter, she studied the seed catalogs in preparation for the coming garden season. And she did this every year.

I enjoy the circle of anniversary and family birthday celebrations, the enjoyment that comes with Christmas, Easter, and the Fourth of July. I appreciate that my life is a circle. And I am remembering how much I learned from these sometimes seemingly endless repetitions that have so profoundly influenced by life.



Go to jerryapps.com for information about Jerry's books and TV shows.

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