



Seven young students enhance their skills at Youth Leadership Congress

Once again Richland Electric Cooperative (REC) sponsored several local students at the 54th annual Youth Leadership Congress (YLC) located at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UW-RF). YLC is a dynamic three-day event sponsored by Wisconsin's local electric cooperatives and facilitated by the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association. This unique structure gives both attendees and youth 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.

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 and wings. UW-RF is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for participants.

This year's students included Sterling Kleist, Kayla Monson, and Shawn Spencer of Richland Center High School; Scott Turgasen, Kayla Turgasen, and Lindsey Neefe of Kickapoo High School; and Joey Crotsenberg-Fraser, who is home-schooled.

The students arrived at REC around 7 a.m. on July 26, where they boarded a van headed for Oakdale Electric Cooperative (OEC). From there, they boarded a charter bus filled with students from OEC, Jackson Electric, Scenic Rivers Energy, and Vernon Electric Cooperative. The 52-passenger

Representing Richland Electric Cooperative at this year's Youth Leadership Congress were, left to right: REC Director Jeff Monson (chaperone), Joey Crotsenberg-Fraser, Shawn Spencer, Sterling Kleist, Kayla Monson, Lindsey Neefe, Scott Turgasen, and Kayla Turgasen.

bus was completely filled with a few chaperones and energetic high school students who arrived in Menomonie around 11 a.m. for lunch.

As the students arrived at the UW-RF campus, the look of concern had officially hit their faces as they became even more unsure of what to expect. Despite what they had seen in flyers and what others had told them, having it become a reality was a different story. The students quickly unloaded their belongings and met with their chaperone. The first step on their arrival is to check into the office where they are given meal cards and dorm room keys. They were assigned a random roommate to ensure students would meet new people and be placed outside of their comfort zone.

The 120-plus students arrived at the University Center, where they met their youth board members and began their orientation. Orientation consisted of "getting to know you" mixers, a welcome to the UW-RF campus, general rules and policies, and instructions on how to run for the youth board. This is the first opportunity for students to interact with one another as they try to complete a co-op bingo card. This game requires students to search for other students who might have a twin, someone who is ambidextrous, a vegetarian, has hazel



eyes, someone who speaks two languages, etc. Often winners will receive candy.

Students are divided into six districts with one youth board member and a couple of chaperones. This is the group the students spend the most time with. During their time at YLC, students attend three district meetings. They get to know each other, discuss youth board opportunities, and participate in classroom activities, including 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-RF. Students are also given case studies to work on during their district meetings. The case studies included “Hiring a new manager,” for which students had to choose the right manager for their cooperative, and “Considering a rate increase,” for which students had to decide to increase rates and how they were going to do so.

The first night ended with a bang as students were entertained by hypnotist Dr. Al Snyder of Mondovi. This was one of the highlights of the week, and many students joined him

on stage. Students who chose not to take the stage were able to get a lot of laughs that they will likely never forget.

Thursday was the busiest day for the students as they began with breakfast at 7:30 a.m. in the commons. Students met with their assigned districts to discuss their agenda for the day and read the story of Toad Lane, the founding cooperative that was started in Rochdale, England, in 1844, by a group of weavers. Following their district meetings, the students witnessed a hot-line demonstration performed by Dunn Energy Cooperative.

A continuous highlight for a number of years is motivational speaker Craig Hillier. He always leaves the students with a heightened sense of determination. Students often go through a roller coaster of emotions during his presentation, from laughter to wonder, to sorrow, and back to laughter. He is able to connect with young adults on a level that most could never imagine. He states at the beginning of his presentation that these three hours will go by so fast, you won’t believe it was actually three hours. He involves the students in a number of activities that often use critical thinking in a way they actually

enjoy. No student is left out as each one has to participate.

Following Craig Hillier's session, the students were given brief free time. During this time students took the opportunity to change into their dress attire, a requirement for students as they are educated on fine dining. The etiquette dinner is a great learning experience for students as they are served a three-course meal and are taught how to properly eat specific foods. Often students are surprised by how much effort goes into these banquets. However, the reward for participating in the etiquette dinner is a dance for the rest of the night. This is a great way for students to end their final night at UW-RF.

During their time at YLC students are heavily encouraged to run for the youth board. The youth board is a great opportunity for six students. Being selected to the youth board means they will have the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., for eight days with other members elected to represent their state. They will meet federal legislators, tour the Smithsonian museums and historical monuments, and attend political sessions based around cooperative topics. This trip is fully funded by the student's sponsoring electric cooperative. Throughout the year these six students communicate with WECA staff to plan the next year's YLC.

If a student wishes to run for the youth board, he or she must acquire 15 signatures from other students. The students will then interview with their current youth board member and a chaperone. Each district chooses two candidates, who each present a two- to three-minute speech as to why he or she should be selected to the youth board.

On the final 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 format is based on how electric cooperatives select their boards, by tallying the most votes.

The students check out of their dorms around 11 a.m. and begin their journey back home. Students arrived back at the REC offices around 3 p.m.

REC Director Jeff Monson joined as a chaperone this year for the first time. We felt it was very important for a director to attend this year's conference to gain valuable experience and understanding as to how YLC benefits young students.

When asked what his overall thoughts of the conference were, he stated, "I thought this would be a typical conference format; however, by the start of the second day I was all in with it. It was wonderful to experience this conference firsthand, and realize how much the students actually get out of it. Being a director, I was able to bring a different view to the students, compared to the other chaperones. I was able to explain to them firsthand my experience with being selected to the board and my duties as a board member currently. I am now fully capable of explaining this conference to potential students as to why they should attend. I hope to return as a chaperone again one day."

Each of these students will receive a Richland Electric Cooperative scholarship upon graduating by simply submitting their application. All other students who were not able to attend YLC 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. 



Students dressed up for the etiquette dinner. Left to right: REC Director Jeff Monson (chaperone), Kayla Turgasen, Scott Turgasen, Lindsey Neefe Sterling Kleist, Joey Crotsenberg-Fraser, Shawn Spencer, and Kayla Monson.

Opposite page: Students engage in a variety of team-building activities. In each of these exercises, students were challenged to complete a task that required cooperation for a successful outcome.



MEMORIES OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

In the summer of 1972, I talked to my father, Herman Apps, about his memories of the Great Depression, which I recorded. He was 72 years old at the time. This what he said:

“In 1930 I had eight milk cows and maybe four or five head of young stock. Four horses were my source of farm power. We sold cream and butter in those days. We got 14 cents a pound for the cream. My cream check was \$3.50 a week. We always had a couple hundred chickens, too. Eggs sold for seven cents a dozen.

But we could buy things much cheaper than now. A pair of shoes sold for \$1.50, bib overalls, 75 cents. I paid 75 cents for a pair of leather gloves and three-tine pitchfork for a dollar. A six-tine fork was \$1.25 or \$1.50 for a good one.

I bought a steel-wheeled wagon for \$75, which was a lot of money. I remember buying three horse harnesses. The first one I bought at an auction for \$35, the second one I bought from Kepler, the harness maker in Wild Rose, for \$65, and the next winter I bought another one from Kepler for \$75.

We moved on the farm in 1924. John R. Jones owned the place and we rented, and saved every dollar with the hopes of buying the place someday. The banks closed during the Depression and we got only 35 percent of the money we'd saved. That was quite a blow.

We finally bought the farm in 1936. The taxes on the place were \$75, which included personal property and real estate.

I remember the dust storms in the 1930s. Sometimes in the morning you couldn't see a thing until nearly 10; the sky was so full of dust. The prairie up by Plainfield would blow, too, but in these hills we didn't have much of a problem with land blowing. That was the time we started planting pine windbreaks, just in case. They planted a lot of windbreaks on the prairie in those years, too.

I made a little extra money working on the road. People

living in a township could work two or three weeks with their team or by themselves and they'd give you \$2.50 or \$3.00 for man and his team for a 10-hour day. I'd dig out stones and level the road. Most all the farmers were willing to work a few days doing this.

I also graded the road that passed by our farm with the horses. I'd do it two or three times a year. In the spring I'd level it off when it was all ruts. The town paid me \$1.50 an hour to grade the road, mighty good money, but they'd only let me grade it a few times a year. It took me about three hours to grade it.

No cars went on the roads in the winter. When winter came, the cars were parked in a shed, jacked up and remained there until spring. Snowplows didn't come through here until the '40s.

During the worst of the Depression we always had a few pigs, mostly Chester Whites and Durocs. Most of the time we butchered them ourselves and peddled the meat. We sold the back half of a pig for \$10 a hundred and the front half for \$8. We got 40 cents for a pig head. We mostly peddled in Wisconsin Rapids because the people there who worked in paper mills still had some money.”



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