



**Richland Electric
Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

'MORE THAN JUST A SCHOLARSHIP'

Five local students step up at Youth Leadership Congress

"This is my second time attending and it was just as good as the first. I met a lot of new people and got to meet new people from around my community. I knew that if I attended this conference I would be guaranteed a scholarship from Richland Electric, but I gained a lot more than just a scholarship."

Those were the words of Richland Center High School student Abi Luttig, who was one of five area students sponsored by Richland Electric Cooperative at this year's Youth Leadership Congress (YLC), held July 25–28 on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

For over 50 years, Wisconsin's electric cooperatives and UW-River Falls have jointly sponsored this unique event, planned by and for high school students. Richland Electric Cooperative has participated almost every one of those years. This year was no different as five students took the initiative to be successful by applying to attend: Megan Brisbois, senior, Ithaca High School; Chloe Klebesadel, senior, Riverdale High School; Corbin Luttig, sophomore, Abi Luttig, senior, and Ocean Ewing, senior, Richland Center High School.



MY CO-OP

Their journey began at the REC offices early on July 25. The students met at 7 a.m. as usual, but this turned out to be the only part of the morning that was “usual.” Typically, students are very quiet when they begin the journey to UW-River Falls, as they don’t know one another yet and aren’t quite sure what to expect. However, these students got to know each other right away thanks to Corbin Luttig, who made everyone laugh by randomly asking each student what his or her favorite meal was. He started off by saying his was Ravioli—not the home-made ravioli but the stuff out of the can. This had everyone laughing with confusion as they could not figure out how canned Ravioli could be anyone’s favorite meal.

The group met up with a number of students from electric cooperatives throughout the state at Oakdale Electric Cooperative, where they all boarded a bus headed for UW-River Falls. During the trip students were able to see the construction of the new Badger Coulee Transmission line, and some were able to see the helicopter assist in the work.

Upon arriving at UW-River Falls, the students were greeted by members of the Youth Board, including Sterling Kleist of Richland Center. Kleist was elected to the Youth Board during last year’s Youth Leadership Congress. He was proudly sporting an umbrella with a sword handle to help direct traffic, and he kept the laughter going as the students arrived.

Students are randomly assigned a roommate for the duration of YLC to ensure they meet and interact with new people during their stay. They met up with the entire YLC delegation—a little over 100 students—almost immediately after checking in. It wasn’t long before the entire delegation got to know each other, thanks to the lively “ice-breakers.”

The staple icebreaker during YLC is “Cooperative Bingo.” Students are required to get signatures from other students to fill out their card. The goal is to find a different student to go with a specific block on the card. For example, a block may require students to find another student who is ambidextrous, or a vegetarian, or someone who speaks more than one language.



Representing Richland Electric Cooperative at this year’s Youth Leadership Congress were, front row, left to right: Abi Luttig, Chloe Klebesadel, and Megan Brisbois; and back row, left to right: Ocean Ewing and Corbin Luttig.

This activity got the students up and out their chairs, working together to help others complete their cards.

After the ice-breakers, students received their first lesson on cooperatives. Professor David Trechter, agriculture economics instructor and department chair at UW-River Falls, educated students on the operation of cooperatives and how they are established. As is typically the case, students were





Shown here and on the facing page, bottom row: Students get to know each other while practicing their and problem-solving skills through a variety of interactive team-building exercises on the first day of the Youth Leadership Congress.

surprised to learn how many businesses in their area are actually cooperatives.

After a lesson on cooperatives, students learned which district they were assigned from the number on their name tags. Students spend the most time with those in their district. Each district includes a YLC board member and a couple of chaperones and is assigned a couple of case studies. One such study is “Hiring a New Manager,” for which students must choose which of five manager candidates to hire. This study always sparks some interesting debate.

The first day was capped off with a magic show by Wisconsin native Ryan Martin of Reedsburg. The highlight of the evening, however, was a presentation by former YLC board member and current UW-Oshkosh student Tessa Otto. Otto is a great inspiration to the students because of the opportunities she has been given through YLC. She spoke about her YLC experience and the many doors it has opened up.

Following her term on YLC, she was elected to the NRECA national youth board, served as an NRECA red shirt, and is currently serving an internship for Harley Davidson, which really made the students’ jaws drop! She explained that her video application was selected out of thousands of other applications. Her internship entails traveling around the country on a brand-new 2018 Harley Davidson and posting about it on social media. The real kicker is that at the end of her

internship, she not only comes away with vast knowledge and experience but also the Harley Davidson she has been driving all summer.

Otto’s experience really opened the students’ eyes to all the possibilities that are out there.

The second day began in the best way possible—with Craig Hillier, a motivational speaker who has been presenting at YLC for over 20 years. He always leaves students with a heightened sense of determination. He can connect with young adults on a level that most could never imagine. His program consists of several team-building and critical-thinking exercises.

Another YLC staple is the hotline demonstration. Two linemen from Dunn Energy Cooperative present this demonstration to make students aware of the dangers of powerlines, and also to show the students how rewarding a linework career can be.

As the day came to a close, the students were tasked with something they were unfamiliar with: an etiquette dinner. This experience requires the students to wear dress clothes and learn the proper etiquette of formal sit-down dinner. They dine in multiple courses and learn the appropriate use of formal silverware and glassware. It can be overwhelming, but it’s a valuable experience. Students typically enjoy the etiquette dinner but are more excited about the dance that comes after.

Since the first day of YLC, students learn what a great experience serving on the Youth Board can be. On the final day of the conference, they get their own chance to achieve this unique accomplishment. Students who wish to run for the youth board get a petition to be signed by their peers, after which they conduct an interview with their district’s Youth Board member and a chaperone. Two students are chosen from each district; these students give a short presentation in front of their peers to try and get their vote, after which students cast their ballots. This election format is based how electric cooperatives select their boards.

The students arrived back at the REC offices in mid-afternoon tired, but with newfound friends, a new understanding of cooperatives, new appreciation for their own potential, and a greater awareness of the opportunities that are open to them.—*Trevor Clark, director of outreach services* 

MEMBER APPRECIATION PICNIC

Saturday, October 13
11 to 2 p.m.
REC Service Center

Come help us celebrate October Co-op Month with fellowship and a tasty meal prepared by our employees and directors!



MAKING HAY

What does it smell like?" Pa would ask my brothers and

me that question often. He taught us to appreciate the subtle sweet smell of wild apple blossoms, the earthy smell of newly plowed soil and the smell of the land after it had rained and it had been dry for weeks. I've not forgotten the wonderful smell of sweet clover and alfalfa hay drying in the field prior to hauling it to the barn.

I will never forget walking home from school on a cold snowy afternoon and catching the smell of wood smoke on the north wind, which told me that I was getting close to home. When I arrived home I smelled homemade vegetable soup steaming on the woodstove. Later on these stormy, snowy evenings, Ma would find a pan with a cover, drop in a big slice of butter, add a handful of popcorn and put it on the hot part of the woodstove. My brothers and I would take turns moving the pan back and forth so the popcorn wouldn't burn as the kitchen was filled with smell of the popping corn in melted butter. The smell of ma's homemade bread ranked right near the top of the special smells that I remember. The smell of sauerkraut brewing in the pantry and the smell of it cooking on the woodstove may not appeal to everyone. But I liked the rather pungent smell of kraut cooking and I liked to eat it as well.

While cultivating with a one-horse cultivator, we'd often turn up an unusual fieldstone and show it to Pa. He would look at it carefully, check its appearance, feel its texture, and heft its weight, as he taught us to do. We came to know these stones as something special. Pa had a fundamental hatred for the larger stones, of which our terminal moraine farm had many. Larger fieldstones broke plow points, bent and broke farm machinery, and required removal from our

fields every spring before the fields could be planted to crops.

Wild raspberries, wild black berries and even some wild strawberries grew on our home farm—eating them was always a treat. And I've never forgotten the sweet, natural taste of these wild berries. Without realizing it, I was learning how to use all of my senses—seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting when I was growing up.

Receiving a new pair of bib overalls was always a special treat. I usually got a new pair before school started in the fall and another new pair before the annual Christmas program at the country school. I've not forgotten the smell and feel of new blue denim and how privileged I felt, because many of my schoolmates' parents did not have enough money to buy new bib overalls. A friend's mother made overalls for her boys. One thing I learned well from Pa was never to brag, especially not to brag that you have new store-bought overalls and the neighbor boys wore ones that their mother made.



Go to www.jerryapps.com for more information about Jerry's writing and television work. Contact Jerry at jerryappsauthor@gmail.com with questions or comments.

Shannon Clark, Manager/CEO

1027 N. Jefferson St., P.O. Box 439, Richland Center, WI 53581

608-647-3173

www.rec.coop

Find us on Facebook 



**Richland Electric
Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Board of Directors

Calvin Sebranek, President • Daniel Hillberry, Vice President • Judy Murphy, Secretary • Tim Tiller, Treasurer
Gerald Wendorf, Don Huffman, Jim Goplin, Steven Fuller, Jeff Monson