



The Washington Youth Tour: One-week trip requires all-year planning

Even with the plethora of travel-related apps and websites available today, planning a family vacation takes a lot of work. Try finding an inexpensive flight that's not at the crack of dawn or late at night or booking a good hotel that's near most of the places you want to visit. Then—just for fun—add in buying tickets to a



popular attraction, a process that can take patience, persistence and precision timing.

Now, imagine doing all of this for a “family” that numbers as many as 130—Georgia’s annual Washington Youth Tour (WYT) contingent of delegates, chaperones and staff. The trip lasts a week, but the planning process goes on all year.

Georgia Electric Membership Corp.’s Gale Cutler, who has served as WYT director since 2000, has already booked the delegation’s Washington-area hotel through 2019. Also, each year during the June trip, Cutler goes online after midnight to request the following year’s wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery, which can be done exactly a year in advance.

Last year, Cutler and Tour Coordinator Lindsay Bridges stepped out of a banquet in March to go online



LOUIS TONSMEIRE

From left, Suji Han, of Newnan, and Juhee Shim, of Peachtree City, represented Coweta-Fayette EMC on the 2016 Washington Youth Tour.

and book June admission tickets for the Holocaust Memorial Museum the minute they became available. Planning the Washington Youth Tour takes “if you snooze, you lose” to the highest level.

“It takes a lot of timing and a little bit of luck to get tours and tickets at times that we can assemble to create a great trip, but it is worth it,” Cutler says. “Our goal is to craft an experience that takes teens ‘up close and backstage’ with our country’s legislators and landmarks to provide a personal connection to our nation’s history and inspire them to become better leaders.”



BETH McMILLAN

After the Marine Corps Sunset Parade at the Iwo Jima Memorial, Juhee and Suji joined other delegates in greeting the servicemen and women who participated.

Magazine cover photos: A peek behind the scenes

After delegates from across Georgia arrive in Atlanta for the Washington Youth Tour kickoff, they pose for the first of the week’s many photo ops. This, however, is the only one in front of a green screen.

Photographer Louis Tonsmeire, of Cartersville, banters with the dressed-up delegates, grouped by EMC, helping to ease any nervousness they (or their parents) may have at meeting so many new people. Once one group’s photo is completed, another is ushered in. The *GEORGIA Magazine* cover shoot finishes up just in time for the kickoff banquet.

Magazine Production Coordinator Gayle Hartman then goes through all the images, picking out the best one of each co-op’s delegates (eyes open, clothes and hair in place). The green screen is removed, the photos are retouched and a Washington, D.C., landmark—most often the U.S. Capitol—is placed behind the delegates. The process takes several weeks because of the volume of photos involved.

The cover shots were taken on site in Washington,



BYRON McCOMBS

As photographer Louis Tonsmeire lines up the shot, Washington Youth Tour delegates pose for the cover of *GEORGIA Magazine*. The green screen is later replaced with an iconic Washington, D.C., scene.

D.C., until 2009. The change came about because of the Youth Tour’s busy schedule and the time the photo shoot took. Plus, shooting the photos outdoors meant the weather could always be a factor.



BYRON McCOMBS

'More than any other annual visitors, we look forward to having your incredible group of young men and women spend time with us here at Mount Vernon. We see thousands upon thousands of students from across the nation, yet your group distinguished themselves by their depth of knowledge, their eagerness to learn and how they carried themselves.'

Samuel G. Murphy

Manager, Department of Historic Trades
George Washington's Mount Vernon

'The National Cathedral was the most beautiful stop on the tour. I was overwhelmed when I walked inside to see the enormous arches and gorgeous stained-glass windows. The whole cathedral was elaborately ornamented with the kind of very detailed art I always enjoy.'

Suji Han

Coweta-Fayette EMC



BETH McMILLAN

'Arlington National Cemetery made the greatest impression on me because every one of the soldiers sacrificed his or her life to preserve freedom.'

Juhee Shim

Coweta-Fayette EMC



BYRON McCOMBS

Georgia's 2016 Washington Youth Tour delegation gathers at the base of the Washington Monument.

Want to go on the 2017 Washington Youth Tour?



DANIEL PECK STUDIOS

'I have always had an interest in the Holocaust, so the Holocaust Memorial Museum definitely made the greatest impression on me. Looking at pictures and watching videos of the horrible incidents the Jewish people suffered reminded me how thankful I should be for my freedoms.'

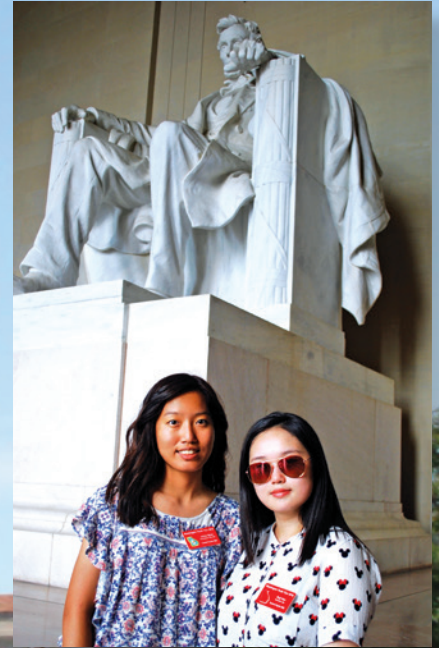
Suji Han
Coweta-Fayette EMC

'A lesson I learned from the tour is that being a leader means working together, sharing different opinions and never giving up. I would tell others to come with an open mind, because you will meet delegates from all over the country with different backgrounds and perspectives.'

Juhee Shim
Coweta-Fayette EMC

'I always knew I wanted to make a positive change in my community, but through this tour I realized that my aspirations can go way beyond the borders of my small town.'

Maria Velasquez
Altamaha EMC



BETH MCMILLAN



'The Holocaust Memorial Museum was my favorite stop. Not only did it do a fantastic job of explaining the tragedy, it memorialized the victims in the best way possible. It turns their suffering into a cry for action so that the world never stands by and watches something like that happen again.'

Peyton Lee
Southern Rivers Energy

Contact your electric cooperative for information!

Delegates' career paths lead back to Washington, D.C.

For some delegates, the Washington Youth Tour (WYT) experience whets their appetite for a career in public service or reaffirms a decision they already had made. Here are two WYT alumni from Georgia who returned to the nation's capital to work.

Talk a little about your current position and responsibilities.

★ **Andrew C. Wills**
2006 WYT delegate
representing Satilla REMC

I am the director of government relations and counsel for the American Public Power Association, a trade association that provides services for more than 2,000 community-owned utilities through advocacy, education and collaboration. I work with members of the U.S. Congress and their staffs to understand how proposed and existing legislation affects public power utilities.



Andrew C. Wills

staff who led the WYT and they introduced me to Anne Hicks at Georgia Transmission Corp., where I was hired as a legal intern. This was my first job during law school, and it paved the way for a career in energy law and policy.

Duval: I cannot say enough about what this weeklong program has to offer. Visiting D.C., learning about our nation's history and meeting with elected officials provided me an opportunity to explore my passions and goals in life. One of the most rewarding takeaways from the week was learning the importance of leadership and how to be a leader, a lesson that stuck with me through college and now in my career.

What advice would you give to current Youth Tour delegates?

Wills: Do your research, because you'll better understand the significance of what you're seeing. Make friends, because those friends may build the foundation for your first network outside your hometown. Make connections, because people you meet may be your professional allies for many years. Above all, have fun and take advantage of the amazing opportunity the WYT provides!

Duval: Make the most of this week in D.C. and get to know your peers, because the relationships you build during the week will last a lifetime. Thank you to Georgia EMC, Youth Tour leaders, chaperones and my fellow delegates for making my week in D.C. a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

★ **Zellie Duval**
2008 WYT delegate
representing Rayle EMC

As a current [Capitol] Hill staffer in Washington, D.C., I have the honor to serve as the legislative correspondent for U.S. Rep. Buddy Carter, from the 1st District of Georgia. My responsibilities include managing the office mail program and handling the legislative portfolio for agricultural issues, Second Amendment issues, and science and technology.



Rep. Buddy Carter and Zellie Duval

How did the Washington Youth Tour (WYT) prepare you for the career path you've taken?

Wills: The WYT was my first visit to Washington, D.C., and the first time I considered the critical role that national politics play in our day-to-day lives. I fell in love with our capital city—its many beautiful monuments, historical markers and essential executive, legislative and judicial activity. The WYT connected me with an amazing group of my Georgia peers, many of whom became lifelong friends. Finally, I maintained contact with EMC

★ Washington Youth Tour 2017 tentative itinerary

June 8: Kickoff banquet, Atlanta

June 9: Team-building activities; flight to Washington, D.C.

Dates TBD for the following activities:

- Tour and lunch at Mount Vernon; dinner at Union Station; evening guided tour of memorials; photo op at White House
- Guided tour of Jefferson, Lincoln, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans memorials; Arlington National Cemetery guided tour; dinner performance of "Beauty and the Beast" at Toby's Dinner Theatre in Columbia, Md.
- All States assembly; tour Smithsonian museums; cruise on Potomac River
- Tour Supreme Court, U.S. Capitol and Washington National Cathedral; Sunset Parade at U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima statue)
- Meet with Georgia's congressional delegation; tour Newseum and Library of Congress; All States farewell event

June 15: Return flight to Atlanta

Note: Itinerary subject to change