

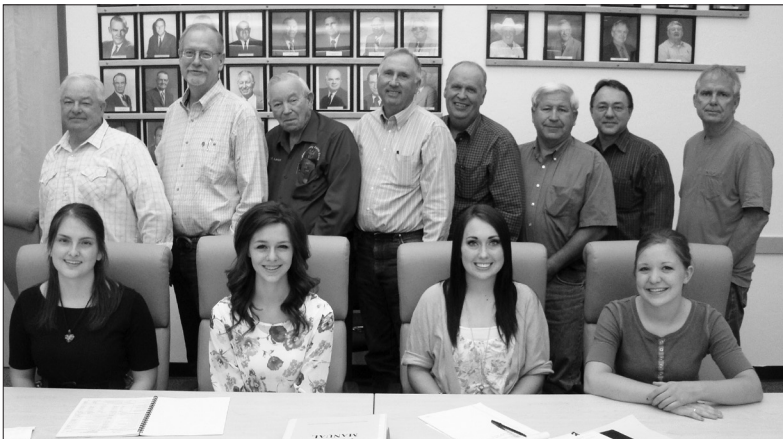
## Students Return from Washington, D.C., With Stories and Newfound Patriotism

By Susan Romney

As students return to classes, a few can share some terrific memories of an extraordinary summer. For Thatcher High School students Jessica Wright, Chantel Udall and Michelle Weatherhead and Safford High's Whitney Larson, the word "patriotism" took on new meaning as they enjoyed a week-long tour of Washington, D.C., compliments of Graham County Electric Cooperative.

Every year, high school juniors compete for the opportunity to participate in the Washington Youth Tour, an event sponsored by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and Touchstone Energy Cooperatives. This year's delegates joined nearly 1,600 students from across the United States as they toured historically significant sites such as Mt. Vernon, Arlington National Cemetery, Fort McHenry, Ford's Theater and several memorials and museums, including the Holocaust and Smithsonian Institution.

Through the organization and operation of a soda pop co-op, students learned the workings of an actual cooperative. Their membership in the co-op allowed them to purchase products—soda pop, juice and water—at a fraction of the vending-machine price. Profits were divided among the members at the conclusion of the trip.



Seated from left are Jessica, Whitney, Michelle and Chantel. Standing from left are board members Jerry Kempton, Robert Reed, Gene Larson, Reuben McBride, Jim Bryce, Chris Claridge, Mike Crockett and Dennis Jacob.

Students experienced congress in action as they acted as legislators in a congressional insight workshop. Each group visited with representatives from their own districts while touring Capitol Hill.

In an address to the co-op's board of directors August 1, each of the delegates expressed gratitude for what they agreed was a life-changing experience.

Jessica, daughter of Joel and Diane Wright, said even though her brothers Joel and Nathan were alumni of the tour and had convinced her it would be an amazing trip, she still was unprepared for how great the experience actually was.

Whitney, daughter of Reed and Mary Ann Larson, was the second in her family to be chosen for the tour. Her sister Katie Ann took the tour in 2010. Whitney said the trip lived up to her expectations and she was especially impressed with the impeccable organization that went into the planning and execution of the tour.

Michelle, daughter of Mike and Juli Weatherhead, was impressed with the caliber of students she met from across the country. Michelle was chosen as Arizona's delegate to NRECA's Youth Leadership Council, which allow her a second all-expense-paid trip to D.C. for a youth leadership workshop in July. In February 2013, she will represent Arizona and Graham County Electric at the NRECA Annual Meeting in New Orleans—another all-expense-paid trip.

Chantel, daughter of David and Kristi Udall, described the feeling she had as she visited the various memorials and Mt. Vernon as "almost sacred."

"Washington, D.C. was more than I ever dreamed it would be," she said. "Thank you for making this trip possible."

Graham County Electric Cooperative lineman Myles Ray and his daughter Kassie Brawley chaperoned the group.

Than Ashby, the trip's local coordinator, said of the delegates, "I think I speak for all of us when I say we were very well-represented. The students go through quite an intense process of testing, essay writing and an interview before they are chosen for the trip."

The Washington Youth Tour got its inspiration



**Whitney Larson stands next to a marine. After reflecting on the trip, Whitney said, "I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to travel to our nation's historical sites with the Arizona Youth Tour. I've gained such a greater appreciation for our nation's founding fathers and the struggles they went through to secure our freedom."**

from Lyndon B. Johnson when he addressed NRECA's Annual Meeting in Chicago in 1957. The future president declared, "If one thing goes out of this meeting, it will be sending youngsters to the national capital where they can actually see what the flag stands for and represents." Rural electric cooperatives have sponsored more than 40,000 students on the educational tour since its inception.

Susan Romney, assistant Washington Youth Tour coordinator, said, "What model representatives these delegates are for the co-op. We hope the experience will serve them well. This program opens doors and provides opportunities to students that they may never have otherwise had.

"Each year alumni of the tour who have a desire

to learn more about the daily activities of a congressional office are offered internships working for congressmen at the Capitol. Their duties include conducting Capitol tours, research, data entry, learning about specific legislative issues, constituent responses and much more. This is a great opportunity to get a first-hand taste of how the government works."

Whitney, Michelle, Jessica and Chantel, along with Than, will visit local high schools soon to promote the Washington Youth Tour contest. They encourage all juniors with an interest in free travel, education and making new friends to join the competition. Applications will be available at the GCEC office in Pima or from student counselors at local high schools. ■

# O'er the Land of the Free We Flew

By Chantel Udall

From the rolling seas, the plains, the prairies and the mountains, I am proud to call America my home. The Washington Youth Tour of rural community electric co-ops across America was not only a great blessing, honor and opportunity, but an amazing chance to learn more about the history of this magnificent nation.

As an American, I learned that I share a great free land and that the men who helped establish such a country on certain unalienable rights deserve the tribute that is held to them. In the course of the Washington Youth Tour, I developed a deeper understanding of our nation's foundation, gained friendships and became motivated to be an active American.

When we first flew into the capital, the warm, wet air brought with it a feeling. This feeling was a love of our country. At our first stop, Fort McHenry, we saw the banner yet wave over the home of the brave. Courageous Navy officers practiced drills outside the marvelous fort where old glory flew above the cannons and fort.

The feelings that site stirred only grew when we continued on to see the Capitol. The great White House stood sturdy amongst the busy hustle of the bustling city. Elected leaders whose decisions affect us every day were working within a few hundred yards of where we stood. Not only that, but those leaders were pleased to discuss with us proud Americans about this great nation. Who had made this nation possible? We learned that next.

Pulling up to Arlington National Cemetery was breathtaking. Did my grandfathers and great-grandfathers really lay in that cemetery, marking the blood of thousands upon thousands who gave up their life for a cause that's right? We stood breathless as the guard of the unknown soldier paced 21 strides right in step in honor of the greatest sacrifice. I knew then that this country was something for which I, too, would stand and give my life.

Not only did I learn about our country's history, I also gained friendships. Some friendships were close-knit hearts with other tourists. Laughs were shared and tears shed as we viewed the Smithsonian museums, Holocaust Museum, the Vietnam Wall and Korean War Memorial. These touching sites not only stirred the hearts of the friends present, but inspired honor for those leaders who are past. Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and countless leaders who believe in our nation inspired a sacred feeling. Friendships were felt with these leaders who led our country through decades.

Through the years, America has been through wars, economic depressions and crises that are almost unimaginable, but it has always triumphed. The tour of Washington, D.C.,

motivated me to want to lead our country through the turmoil and strife that we so often face. I now know that I will stand with the leaders who hoisted our flag in Iwo Jima, who cried peace in economic depressions, who brought warfare down and united nations up. As an American citizen, I will stand and represent all those who went before. This great nation is one I am proud to participate in, grateful to contribute to and satisfied to sanctify.

This land is your land, this land is my land and now I know that for it I stand. As an American citizen, I will always be planted on this holy ground, which I am blessed to be a part of. What a marvelous opportunity it was to gain the awareness, friendships and responsibility that our capital and constitution offers to every citizen. Viewing this land of the free was an opportunity of a lifetime. The memory of the Washington Youth Tour will be a remembrance not only of sights and sounds, but the feeling beating in my heart of what it really means to be an American. ■



Chantel Udall



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From left, Steve Lines, Jesus Legarda, Mary Helen Legarda and Dennis Jacob. Dennis presents a check to Mary for funds raised at the Benefit Fish Fry.

## Thank You, Graham County

Once in a while I am reminded of why I love living in this great community. I had one of those reminders on June 22 when you—our friends, neighbors and members—came together to support one of our own, Mary Helen Legarda.



Steve Lines

Most of us have experienced the feeling of helplessness that comes when someone close to us gets the terrifying news they have cancer. When this happened to the wife of one of our employees, we were all struck with that feeling of wanting to help and not knowing what to do.

One of our directors, Dennis Jacob, suggested having a benefit fish fry. He not only volunteered to donate the fish, but agreed

to cook it. Having never done anything like this before, we had no idea how to pull it off or what to expect as far as a turnout was concerned. But we advertised our event, got busy selling tickets and hoped for a decent outcome. And wow, did we ever get one! We were absolutely overwhelmed by the community support. With your help, we were able to raise more than \$4,000 to help with expenses.

Being the good, kind, humble person she is, I am sure Mary Helen has many friends. I am also sure many of you who attended our fish fry, and some who were unable to attend, but donated money anyway, don't even know her, but wanted to help just because that's the kind of people you are.

On behalf of the co-op employees, directors, and Jesus and Mary Helen, thank you. What a wonderful community we live in.