

Rayle Lines

Member Newsletter

January 2026

The Official Newsletter of Rayle Electric Membership Corporation



GEORGIA'S LARGEST WYT DELEGATION EVER

By Lindsay Penticuff

In June, Georgia's electric membership corporations (EMCs) sent their 60th—and largest ever—delegation of students to Washington, D.C., for the all-expenses-paid, weeklong Washington Youth Tour (WYT).

Representing 38 Georgia EMCs, 116 high schoolers attended, along with 14 chaperones sent by co-ops and three representatives from Tucker-based Georgia EMC. The tour was June 13-20.

"The 2025 Youth Tour was a huge success!" says Andy Paul, WYT Director and Public Relations Representative with Georgia EMC. "Our students got to see historic events happening in our nation's capital, meet with legislators and tour several museums."

Highlights of last year's event included stops at the Smithsonian Institution museums, the National Archives, George Washington's Mount Vernon, Arlington National Cemetery and the World War II, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Martin Luther King Jr., Jefferson, Lincoln, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans memorials. On Capitol Hill day, students met with U.S. representatives in a congressional town hall, then spent time with U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock on the Capitol steps.

Paul says one of the most memorable parts of the Youth



Tour was participating in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Four delegates—Reginald Ward from GreyStone Power Corp. in Hiram, Leila Eastmead from Planters EMC in Millen, Chloe Toole from Walton EMC in Monroe and J.C. Nimmer from Satilla REMC in Alma—represented Georgia's EMCs during the ceremony.

Each year, one Georgia student-delegate on the Washington Youth Tour is chosen to join the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Leadership Council (YLC). Kevin Ray from Grady EMC in Cairo was selected by his peers as the 2025 YLC representative.

MORE ▶

The wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery is memorable for WYT delegates.



The 2025 Washington Youth Tour delegation is all smiles during a visit to George Washington's Mount Vernon.





Celebrating 60 *years* of the Washington Youth Tour

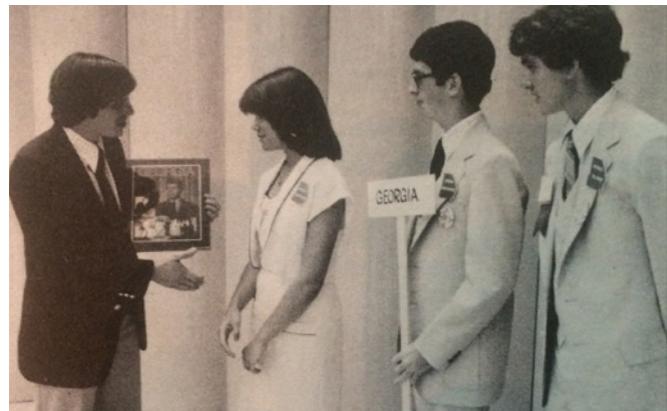
Georgia's electric membership corporations (EMCs) participated in their first Washington Youth Tour (WYT) in 1965, making the trip last June the state's 60th year attending what many students have described throughout the years as the "trip of a lifetime."

In June 1965, Georgia was one of 17 states to send students on the tour, joining more than 600 students from across the nation. Twelve students from three Georgia electric co-ops—Walton EMC in Monroe, Flint EMC (now Flint Energies) in Reynolds and Planters EMC in Millen—left Savannah by train to visit the nation's capital.

Today, 38 states participate in the WYT, and more than 1,800 students attend. Georgia's 116 delegates represented 38 Georgia EMCs.

The idea for the program took shape in 1957, when future President Lyndon B. Johnson—then majority leader of the U.S. Senate—suggested at a National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Annual Meeting that rural electric co-ops should bring their young people to the nation's capital to learn firsthand how their government operates. Co-ops began sponsoring individual youth tours like the one Georgia's EMCs host today.

Coordinating the Washington Youth Tour takes year-round preparation by Georgia EMC's WYT Director as well as each EMC's tour coordinator.



Bill Verner, right, was a Washington Youth Tour delegate in 1979, representing Central Georgia EMC in Jackson. He also served as Georgia EMC's WYT director in the '80s and '90s.

"Preparing for the Youth Tour involves constant studying and research," says Andy Paul, WYT Director and Public Relations Representative with Tucker-based Georgia EMC. Last year was his third year coordinating the trip. "I also try to communicate as much as possible with delegates and parents so that trust is built before 130-plus of us travel to Washington, D.C., after having just met at the kickoff banquet."

He adds that local WYT coordinators also are working to prepare delegates for the trip.

"This includes hosting events to answer questions from students and parents, offering clear communications about expectations and building excitement by assuring them



In the early years of the Washington Youth Tour, Georgia delegates met with U.S. presidents in the White House Rose Garden. Delegates visit with the late President Lyndon B. Johnson, above, and the late President Jimmy Carter, right, who was also from Georgia.





Rayle EMC delegates pose for a photo during the 2025 Washington Youth Tour. From left: Callie Bridges of Lexington, Jake Huff of Winterville and Kate McWhorter of Lincolnton.



Andy Paul, the current WYT Director for Georgia EMC, was a Youth Tour delegate in 2011, representing Rayle EMC in Washington.

all that this will be their favorite week of their high school career," he says.

Paul attended the Washington Youth Tour as a delegate representing Washington-based Rayle EMC in 2011, when he was a rising junior in high school.

"I grew up in an EMC household, with my dad working at Rayle EMC and also Walton EMC, so I knew the sense of community that EMCs carried," he says. "I love being in Washington, D.C., and one of my passions is creating meaningful experiences for students, so this was truly the perfect role for me!"

Bill Verner was Youth Tour director in the 1980s and early 1990s. He retired after 40 years in the electric co-op world in September 2020.

Like Paul, Verner had been a WYT delegate before becoming the WYT statewide director. He attended the Youth Tour in 1979 shortly after graduating from high school, representing Central Georgia EMC in Jackson, and his sister, Sandra Verner Latimer, participated in Georgia's first Youth Tour in 1965. Verner also was elected by Georgia's delegation to represent the state on the 1979 NRECA Youth Leadership Council, formerly the Youth Counseling Board.

"I had an incredible year and got to speak on behalf of the NRECA youth program at the national FFA convention in Kansas City, at the National Grange farmer meeting in Pennsylvania, to a national 4-H gathering, and then to the NRECA meeting in New Orleans," Verner recalls. "It was a

pretty heady experience for a college freshman from the little town of Rutledge."

As Youth Tour director during the beginning of his tenure at Georgia EMC, Verner says it was an honor taking young people to Washington, D.C., each year.

"Seeing the nation's capital and getting to interact with our elected officials ... I think it makes our federal government more tangible and relatable," he says. "The laws and regulations that come from our nation's capital are going to affect all of us, and understanding where that policy comes from and the history of our country is something everyone should have an experience to see firsthand. And there's no better way of doing that than on the Washington Youth Tour."

Gale Cutler became the statewide director in April 2000—two months before her first-ever WYT—and took 2,007 students on the tour over two decades. She says it's difficult to choose a favorite place to visit or a memory after 20 years of coordinating the trip, but she cherishes the delegates' day at the Capitol.

"At the beginning of the week, they are kids going on a field trip. But when they are talking with our legislators, they are young, engaged constituents. ... They realize that their government is close enough to touch it if they want to, and they get legislators to look them in the eye, listen to their questions and answer them, and at 16 or 17 years old," Cutler says.

MORE ▶



Apply for the 2026 Washington Youth Tour

The 2026 Washington Youth Tour is scheduled for June 12-19. The all-expenses-paid trip will feature visits to and tours of some of the United States' most iconic and historic venues, in addition to opportunities for high school student delegates to meet with many of our state's national leaders at a town hall event.

Applications for the 2026 Youth Tour are due Feb. 13, 2026. Apply today by visiting rayleemc.com or by submitting an application to Member Services Director Richard Heard, PO Box 1090, Washington GA 30673.



COURTESY DAN STEPHENS

Dan and Karen Stephens

Where are they now?

Dan Stephens, 76, of Peachtree City participated in one of the first Washington Youth Tours with Georgia's electric membership corporations (EMCs).

Stephens represented Planters EMC in Millen on the Youth Tour in 1966 with the Peach State's second

group of delegates. He was a student at Jenkins County High School at the time.

"I remember submitting an essay, and the award of the trip was based on the selection of the best essay," he says.

The essay topic was "Contributions Made to My Community by the Local Co-op."

One of his favorite memories from the busy week was meeting the late President Lyndon B. Johnson in the White House Rose Garden.

"That was a pretty impressive event for anybody to get that opportunity," he says.

After high school, Stephens attended Emory University in Atlanta for two years before transferring to the

University of Georgia (UGA) in Athens, where he majored in business and minored in chemistry.

"After I completed my undergraduate degree, UGA offered me a teacher's assistant position to stay on so I could earn my MBA," he says.

After college, he worked for what is now Truist Bank, formerly known as Trust Co. of Georgia and SunTrust Banks.

"I was never a banker," he says. "I always worked in the parent company or in some support division doing corporate-wide stuff."

Stephens retired about 20 years ago and today spends his time visiting his two children and three grandchildren and traveling with his wife of 47 years, Karen.

"I think we've been to over 65 countries," he says. "We have been to every country in Europe except Portugal, and that was on our trip that got waylaid by COVID-19. We have also been to Africa probably five or six times."

He and his wife also spend time in the Caribbean most summers, teaching sailing lessons to guests, and they help lead a travel group of about 50 people each year to Israel.

Rayle EMC plans Feb. 1 base rate change

Every few years, Rayle EMC, along with an energy consulting firm, updates its cost-of-service calculation, which offers a direct and accurate reflection of current expenses. The base charge, or access fee, covers the costs of operating the cooperative and delivering power. It also includes covering the co-op's cost to maintain more than 3,500 miles of electric lines and 22 substations, while providing 24/7 service and an outage reporting system.

Our last rate adjustment took place in April 2023. Since that time Rayle EMC has experienced cost increases from materials to operations and maintenance, including credit card fees, postage and right-of-way expenses. In addition, nearly three-quarters of every dollar spent is used

to purchase power, and the cost of wholesale power continues to rise. Therefore, it is necessary to adjust our rates in order to maintain the quality of service our members expect.

During the board meeting on Nov. 20, 2025, your Board of Directors reviewed the revised rates along with the supporting study and unanimously approved the revised rate structure. Our rates are designed not to make a profit, but simply to cover the costs of providing that power. This rate adjustment is needed despite continued modest growth in the system and careful attention to cost-containment measures.

Effective with member billings that begin on Feb. 1, 2026, Rayle EMC's residential base charge will move from \$27.50 to \$32 per month,

continuing a long-term initiative to gradually align this monthly access charge with the fixed costs of operating the electric system. The small commercial, large commercial, general service and large agricultural base rates will also increase by \$4.50 per month.

While no one likes a rate increase, this one was necessary to maintain sound financial status for Rayle EMC and to meet the mandated accounting requirements of the Rural Utility Service. We are directly affected by rising operating, generating and supply costs seen in Georgia and the rest of the nation. However, we will make every effort to control our operating costs while striving to provide the best possible service for our members.