

Teen Leader Reflects on Youth Tour 2016

Youth Tour gives Blachly-Lane teen perspective on what it means to be a cooperative

By Pam Spettel

Junction City High School senior Audrey Sherman barely knew what a co-op was before her trip to Washington, D.C., as Blachly-Lane's 2016 National Rural Electric Cooperative Youth Tour representative. She returned with a greater understanding of the co-op business model, the cooperative spirit it took to build an electric system and knowledge of how important that spirit is to sustain a strong nation.

Audrey is the daughter of Bruce and Kristina Sherman of Cheshire. She says her older brother, Austin, who attends Cal Polytechnic State University is one of her best friends.

To say Audrey is a leader in her community and school might be an understatement. She is an active Girl Scout, a member of a community Scandinavian dance group and volunteers at the Greenhill Humane Society animal shelter. She served as the Associated Student Body junior class treasurer last year, and will be the ASB vice president her senior year. She takes advanced placement classes in calculus and biology and honors language arts. She has run cross country and played tennis on school teams.

Audrey also performs her original music, singing and playing guitar, at local open mic nights.

Audrey Sherman is part of a Scandinavian dance group.



She has brought back many highlights from her first trip to the nation's capital.

"Arlington National Cemetery is set in rolling hills with grave after grave after grave," she says. "All of these belong to people who gave their lives. Being there gave me a new definition for 'cooperative'—how we sacrifice ourselves for *each other*. They gave up their lives for *us*. Each headstone has its own story. Arlington gave me such pride in my country and made me thankful to live here.

"The World War II Memorial unites the sacrifice of each state, and shows how we were in this together. The artifacts at the Holocaust Museum—like the huge piles of shoes—were astounding. On the bright side, the long list of names of people who helped is inspirational."

From the top of the Washington Monument Audrey looked out over all of D.C.

"That high up, you can see everything happening in our capital," she says. "Another highlight was at the Lincoln Memorial, standing on the steps overlooking the reflecting pool where Martin Luther King made his 'I Have a Dream' speech. That was so special."

Audrey was a little nervous about meeting co-op kids from around the nation, but found it was fun to get to know the other teens—especially the 15 teens and the chaperones in the Oregon group. Besides visiting all the sites together, they played sand volleyball and ultimate Frisbee as a group, and made friends she says will last a lifetime. A group of them stay in regular contact through social media.

"It's surprising how much you have in common with people," Audrey says. "Other people were so nice, and we got along really well. The group dynamic was supportive and fun."

Jonathan Farmer, from Consumer's Power Inc. of Philomath, was a chaperone.

"Youth Tour is a truly inspirational endeavor that lives up to its billing as a once-in-a-lifetime experience," says Jonathon. "Our group was very tight knit. The Oregon group was supportive, sincere and committed to getting the most out of their time in D.C. We all developed a strong bond, and judging by the continued group conversations, these friendships will last for years to come.



Audrey volunteers at the Greenhill Humane Society shelter.

“Audrey was especially gracious and was always looking out for others to make sure they were included. She still had to go back to school upon returning, and after long days she would still find the energy and time to tend to her studies. She even produced a video for her digital media class of D.C.! Audrey was truly an exemplary representative, and Blachly-Lane should be proud to have sent such a terrific young leader.”

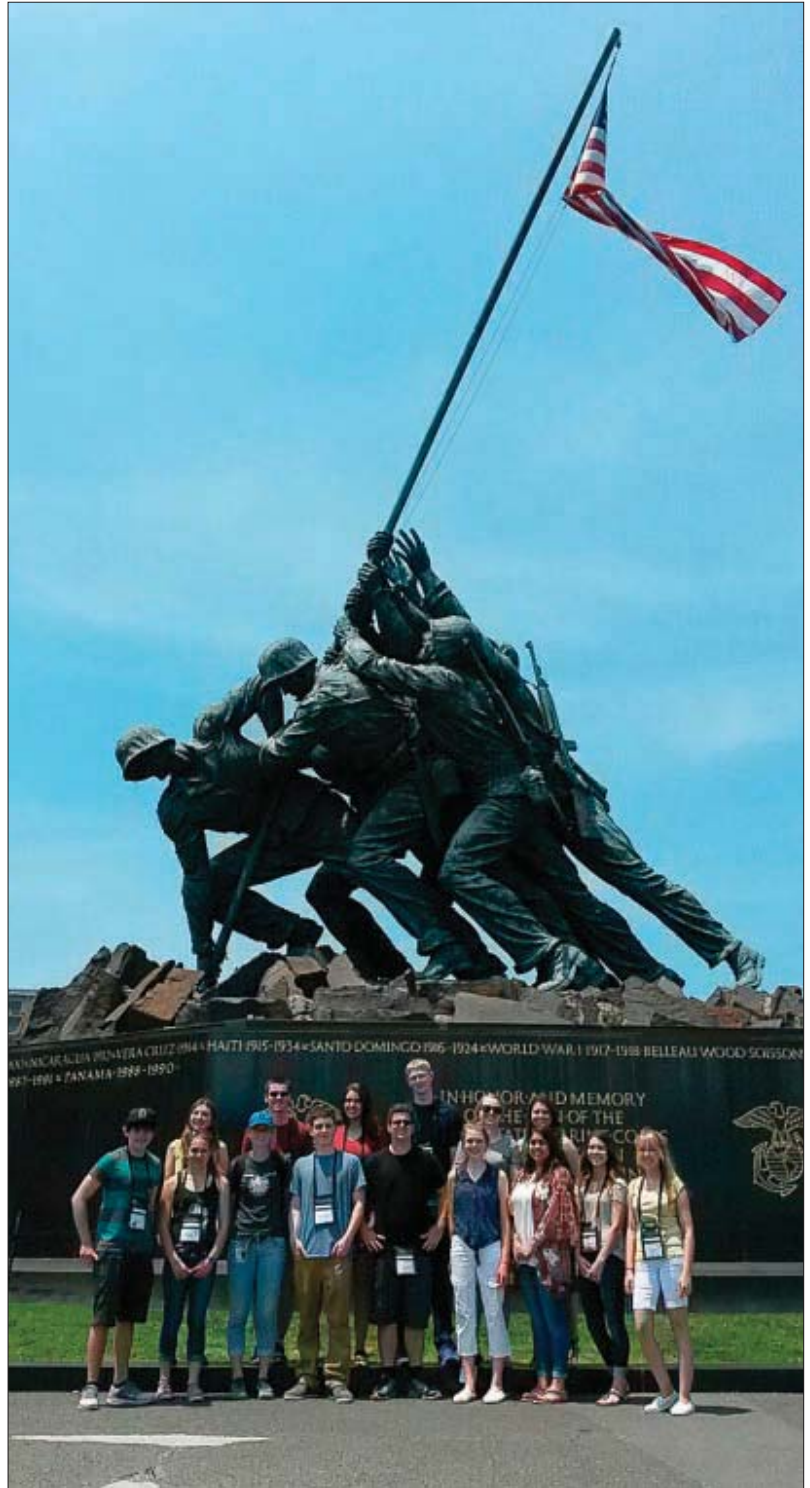
Audrey encourages Blachly-Lane youth to set their sights on the Youth Tour opportunity.

“The trip is so worth taking time to apply,” she says. “It is life changing. Youth Tour gives you a new perspective of yourself and what you can do to change the world. We see these places in books, but when you see them in person, the feeling of being there makes it so powerful.”

Audrey believes sending teens to the nation’s capital benefits co-op members and the community.

“I learned through the Seven Cooperative Principles that co-ops value commitment to community,” she says. “Blachly-Lane members can know that after years of sending one or two kids, those kids alone will go out and do something for their communities. In that one jam-packed amazing week, kids gain knowledge to share with their community. Everywhere they go afterward, they will be leaders, innovators, and teachers to make a positive change in the world.

“I wish everyone at some point in their lives could go to Washington, D.C. There’s nothing like it to



understand your country and what it stands for. The co-op gives a high school junior a chance to have an experience that will put his or her life and nation into new perspective.” ■

Visiting war memorials in Washington, D.C., gave Audrey insight into the sacrifices made for freedom.