

Young Writers Win Spot on Washington Youth Tour



Volunteer Energy Cooperative's 2005 Washington Youth Tour participants were, from left, Brandon Martin, Austin Parkinson, Stephanie Lewis, and Ashley Logan.

Four high school juniors within the Volunteer Energy Cooperative service area have been awarded an all-expense paid week in Washington, D.C.

Tiffany Buckler of Rhea County High School, Lauren Moody of Clarkrange High School, Danielle Gwinn of McMinn County High School, and Lauren Keith of McMinn County High School wrote winning short stories to earn their spot on this year's Washington Youth Tour. The tour brings together high school students who are served by electric cooperatives from across the country for a week of sight-seeing and fun in our nation's capital.

The tour is sponsored by VEC and other rural electric cooperatives from across the nation and is organized by the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. About 120 students from across Tennessee and about 2,400 students from across the nation will be attending.

Lauren Keith was selected as the overall winner from VEC's service area. Her short story,

which appears in this edition of Powerlines, was forwarded for state-wide judging where three winners will be selected. Statewide winners will receive a \$3,000, a \$2,000, or a \$1,000 college scholarship. She is from Athens and is the daughter of Mike and Darlene Keith.

Keith's English teacher at McMinn County High School, Gwen Lane, was also awarded a spot on the trip.

VEC Communications Coordinator Robert McCarty coordinates VEC's participation in the program. He made in-class presentations at the three participating high schools and will chaperone on the trip.

"These students are in for a great week," McCarty said. "I'm excited for them and I'm looking forward to going on the trip myself. This will be my fourth Washington Youth Tour and it never gets old. Every year I'm very impressed with the caliber of young people we have in our communities. I know we often hear a lot about the young people who are out there making trouble and that leads some people to look at our future pessimistically. But after getting to know some of the young people in our service area, I know that when they get their opportunity to lead their communities, we are going to be in great shape."

Rhea County High School's representative on the Washington Youth Tour is from Spring City. She is the daughter of Larry and Dedra Buckler.

Clarkrange High School's Lauren Moody is from Clarkrange and is the daughter of Ken and Cindy Moody.

Danielle Gwinn of McMinn County High was selected as an at-large winner. She is from Sweetwater and is the daughter of Dana and Theresa Gwinn.

McCarty said that typically four high schools are selected each year, on a rotating basis, to participate in the program.

"We have 14 high schools in our service area and unfortunately we just don't have that many spaces available on the tour," McCarty said. "So we rotate the opportunity to just four schools each year so that every school gets to send a student on the trip at some point. This year we had a school choose not to participate so we selected an at-large winner. That's why McMinn County High wound up with two students on the trip this year."

Next year VEC will be offering the program to juniors at York Institute in Jamestown, Meigs County High School, Cumberland County High School, and Walker Valley High School.

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Powerlines is produced by the Volunteer Energy Cooperative's Marketing & Economic Development Department as a service to customers. Comments and suggestions can be e-mailed to vec@vec.org or mailed to VEC Marketing & Economic Development Department, P.O. Box 277, Decatur, TN 37322.

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POWERLINES

Newsletter of Volunteer Energy Cooperative



Extensive Outages put VEC's Emergency Plan into Action

By Rody Blevins President/CEO

In early April severe storms passed through the Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) service area causing a huge number of power outages. At one point about 15,000 VEC members were without power and 43 poles had to be replaced.

Within 24 hours all but a few scattered outages had been repaired. That's repairing outages at a rate of about 625 per

hour. It would be impossible to reach that level of efficiency without two things – good employees and good planning.

VEC has an emergency action plan that was put to the test during the April storms. Although there are always some snags, I think our plan and our employees passed the test with flying colors.

We had some help in the form of very accurate weather forecasts. As these storm systems passed through Tennessee forecasters were able to time them and track them to an extent that was not possible in years past. As we received these warnings, we put management and key employees on alert. Our emergency action plan went into effect and manpower and equipment was readied.



Photo Courtesy of the Crossville Chronicle

Extensive storm damage in the Crossville area put Volunteer Energy Cooperative's Emergency Action Plan to the test in April.

people find it reassuring to talk to a live human being when reporting an outage. But it's easy to see that with 15,000 outages occurring over a span of a few short hours, it would be financially prohibitive to staff our call center to a level at which this volume of calls could be taken quickly enough. It is during extensive outages like these that our IVR System proves its worth.

The IVR System allows us to take in massive amounts of outage information quickly, efficiently, and accurately. This allows managers to allocate resources where they will do the most amount of good much more quickly – and that translates into outages being repaired sooner.

All the planning and technology would be of little value, however, without a knowledgeable, dedicated, and hard-working group of employees. We are blessed at VEC to have a group of employees like this to respond. And they respond in daylight and in darkness, in fair and foul weather, and they often work in these difficult conditions in a close proximity to the electric lines.

I am proud of the work they do everyday, but situations like these major outages we had in April remind me once again how blessed we are to have people we can count on.

Students' Commitment to Community Service Pays Off

A commitment to serving their communities paid off for four students recently as they were named winners in VEC's 2006 Lillard-Shadow Scholarship competition. The Lillard-Shadow Scholarships are named for two men who demonstrated a life-long commitment to community service.

Willis A. Shadow was the University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Agent for Meigs County in 1933. He saw the great potential in bringing electricity to the Decatur/Meigs County area. His leadership helped to create Meigs County Power Association, the organization that would become the Meigs County Electric Membership Corporation and ultimately, Volunteer Energy Cooperative. J.W. Lillard's roots ran deep in the county; he lived and practiced law in Decatur for many years. As a gift to the community he loved, Mr. Lillard volunteered his time and expertise to assist Mr. Shadow in his efforts. Mr. Lillard was the cooperative's first president, providing the necessary consistency of leadership for the first seven years. Because of their vision and commitment to the community, Mr. Shadow and Mr. Lillard were instrumental in improving the lives and livelihood of thousands of residents through electric power. This scholarship honors the community spirit of Willis A. Shadow and J. W. Lillard.

Because of this history, Volunteer Energy Cooperative is happy to announce the winners of the 2006 Lillard-Shadow Scholarships. Each winner, one from each of VEC's service districts, has demonstrated a commitment to community service as well as a commitment to academic excellence.

This year's winner from the Cleveland Service District is Emily Trew of Polk County High School. She is the daughter of Billy Trew of Ocoee, TN.

The winner from the Crossville Service District is Kaleb Buckner of Monterey High School. He is the son of Darson and Marsha Buckner of Monterey, TN.

The Decatur Service District winner is Meagan Armes of Midway High School. She is the daughter of Raymond and Melinda Hester of Kingston, TN.

This year's winner from the Jamestown Service District is Emily Pile of Alvin York Institute. She is the daughter of William and Lisa Pile of Jamestown, TN.

VEC Customers Share

A Little Change Goes a Long Way

By allowing their electric bills to be rounded up to the next dollar Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) customers funded **\$32,500** in community service grants in March. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, a total of **\$1,769,101** in grants has been awarded. The deadline for grant applications is the last day of each month. For additional information, contact the office of Marketing and Economic Development, at 423-334-7051. Applications are also available online, at www.vec.org.

Organizations receiving grants in March include:

Fentress County Children's Center of the Cumberlands - **\$4,745**; SkillsUSA/Tennessee Technology Center (Athens) - **\$1,830**; Monterey Food Bank - **\$1,750**; Pleasant Hill Historical Society of the Cumberlands - **\$1,708**; Pickett County Technology Club - **\$1,675**; Rhea County Rescue Squad - **\$1,500**; New Beginnings Garden Club (Decatur) - **\$1,500**; Meigs County High School Mu Alpha Theta - **\$1,500**; Azuwer, Inc., (Ooltewah) - **\$1,400**; Senior Citizens of Cumberland County - **\$1,275**; Roane Choral Society - **\$1,000**; Walker Valley High School Football Booster Club - **\$1,000**; The Women at the Well (Athens) - **\$1,000**; Walkler Valley High School Marching Mustang Band Boosters - **\$1,000**; Monterey High School Baseball Boosters - **\$1,000**; Reading is Fundamental - **\$800**; Friends of the Art Circle Public Library - **\$620**; Fairview Cemetery - **\$600**; Old Fort Community Club - **\$500**; Midway Quarterback Club - **\$500**; Hull-York DAV, Chapter 5 (Byrdstown) - **\$500**; Pickett County High School Beta Club - **\$500**; Women United in Community Service (Athens) - **\$500**; Charleston Elementary School Chairs for Excellence - **\$500**; McMinn County Senior Citizens, Inc., - **\$500**; MAC Club (Kingston) - **\$500**; Polk County AE Literacy Council - **\$500**; Crossville Carving Club - **\$397**; Polk County High School Women's Fastpitch Softball Boosters - **\$350**; NW Polk Fire Station #5 - **\$300**; Circle of Friends (Grandview) - **\$300**; Lady Aces Softball (Benton) - **\$300**; Chilhowee Youth Girls Recreational Softball - **\$250**; and Monterey High School Project Graduation - **\$200**.

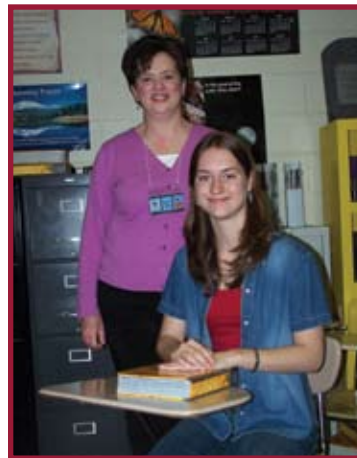


VEC Customers Share Board Member Max Ross, right, presents a grant check to Kendra Wheeler, president of the Meigs County High School Mu Alpha Theta.

Lauren Keith, a junior at McMinn County High School and the daughter of Mike & Darlene Keith of Athens, was the grand prize winner in this year's Washington Youth Tour short story contest. Lauren and three other students, and Lauren's English teacher Gwen Lane won an all-expenses paid week in Washington, D.C. For more information on the Washington Your Tour program see the related article in this issue of Powerlines or visit our website at www.vec.org. Following is Lauren's award-winning short story: "Electric Cooperatives: Going Beyond the Wires." Her story has been forwarded for state-wide judging where Lauren will be competing for a \$3,000 college scholarship.

Electric Cooperatives: Going Beyond the Wires

By Lauren Keith



McMinn County High School English instructor Gwen Lane, standing, and Lauren Keith, will be among VEC's guests on this year's Washington Youth Tour.

It is March 1993 and the big blizzard just hit. All power is off and all the cows have to be milked by hand. Everyone is tired and bored after several hours without television or heat. Everyone is sitting around a big roaring fire defrosting their fingers and toes.

"Well, kids, it looks like we're all snowed in for the long run," says Dad.

"Aw Dad! Can't you do anything?"

"Sorry Dillon, but I cannot do anything. The milking machines, cooling tank, and any other electronic appliances probably won't work for several days. We will have to milk the cows ourselves until the power comes back on."

"Does that mean no school either, Dad?"

"Yes, Suzie!" cry Mom, Dad, and Dillon together.

The snow storm rages on outside, and they all stare into the white expanse that they know is their fields and pastures. Soon Dillon pops up with an idea to relieve the monotony of their situation.

"Hey, Dad. Tell us a story."

"Okay, son. Come closer to the fire and settle in for a while, everyone. This story goes back in time to when there were few settlers here in East Tennessee. This was about the time that electricity started becoming a commodity, but the Tennessee Electric Power Company didn't think that it was worth it to run electric cables to the rural area around here. So your grandfather and some of the citizens came together at the Meigs County Courthouse, and on May 29, 1935, there was the formation of the Meigs County Power Association, Incorporated, which later became the Meigs County Electric Membership Corporation. Then there was hope for all the dairy farmers to increase production and produce a better environment for their families, thanks to the formation of the energy cooperative."

"Wow, Dad! You mean that we can run our electric milking machines all because we belong to this energy thing?" asks Dillon.

"Ha, ha, ha. Yes, all because of this energy thing we belong to," Dad chuckles.

"Hey, I read about this in school," says Suzie. "Our energy cooperative provides more than just electricity. With the VEC Customers Share, customers round their bill up to the nearest dollar, and then all the money raised goes to community ventures to help better our community. Our energy prices are even some of the lowest in the country at about 7.47 cents/kwh. They also hold a writing contest every year for four high schools in their service area. One student from each school wins an all expense paid trip to Washington, D.C. for writing a short story. I remember the girl who won from our school last year. She did not have very much and because of VEC, she got to experience something beyond her wildest dreams. She cried when she found out that she won. It was great."

"That's great information, Suzie. Did you know we also belong to the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation? This cooperative is local, state, and national, and we benefit greatly from it. All our insurance and livestock prices are extremely low because we purchase them through this cooperative. Without it, I'm not sure we would have been able to keep our farm when we fell on hard times last year."

"Didn't our new bull come from some kind of cooperative effort?"

"Yes, Dillon. Through Southeast Select Sires, we received the best bull at a price that was unbeatable. That really helped save our farm, but remember that without VEC, our farm could not exist here today. They are the reason we have these nice new milk machines and the affordable power to run them. They referred us to the Tennessee Farm Bureau and Southeast Select Sires. They made our lives richer and more productive by providing reliable, safe, and efficient services in a courteous and timely manner at a competitive cost."

"Remember that letter than Grandma received after she thanked VEC for paying her electric bill when Grandpa hurt his leg? That really shows just how much our cooperative cares about those it serves."

"Yes, it does Suzie. Now you all remember this when you get older, and support these cooperatives like they have supported our family in time of trouble and prosperity. They are a valued part of the community and deserve our thanks."

"Thank you Volunteer Energy Cooperative for all you do!" they all yell into the howling snowstorm.

PAYING BY E-CHECK IS QUICK AND EASY



Paying your electric bill online is a quick and easy payment option that Volunteer Energy Cooperative is pleased to offer our customers. But to make sure your payment is processed correctly please make sure you fill out the online form correctly. If you fail to enter your financial institution, the routing number, or your account number correctly, it could delay the credit to your account. This image displays the screen you will see when you select the electronic check option from the VE-Bill link on the Volunteer Energy Cooperative website at www.vec.org.

To make sure your payment will be properly credited, enter your financial institution in the first field. Enter the routing number from your check in the second field and enter your account number in the third field. The routing number is a nine digit number typically on the bottom left corner of your check. It is usually followed by the account number and the last numbers in the series on the bottom of the check is the check number. If you are in doubt as to which number is the routing number and which is the account number, check a bank statement or other document that contains your checking account number.

Once you are sure you have entered all the information correctly, click on the "submit" icon. Once you've clicked on the submit button, the process cannot be stopped. Clicking "cancel" or "back" will not stop the transaction.

