



FOUNDATION FOR RURAL  
EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

## 2003 Leadership Through Learning Youth Program Sponsored by NECA

During the week of March 23, 2003, FRED hosted its second annual Leadership Through Learning Youth Program. Fifteen of the brightest high school juniors set out on an adventure of a lifetime. Despite the possible threat of war, the students arrived safely and were excited to be in the nation's capital. New friendships were a major part of the program as students from Maine to Oregon and Ohio to Louisiana met for the first time. Being from rural areas was a common bond that linked the students together but they also discovered that they had a lot to learn from one another.

### 2003 Leadership Through Learning Program Participants and Nominating Telephone Companies

Matthew Berry, Massachusetts  
nominated by *Granby Telephone Company*

Erin Bilodeau, Maine  
nominated by *Northland Telephone Company of Maine*

Laura Denker, Missouri  
nominated by *Mid-Missouri Telephone Company*

Megan Duet, Louisiana  
nominated by *Lafourche Telephone Company*

Kitty Edelman, Oklahoma  
nominated by *Canadian Valley Telephone Company*

Jason Eubanks, Oklahoma  
nominated by *Salina Spavinaw Telephone Company, Inc.*

Charlie Hall, Oregon  
nominated by *Mt. Angel Telephone Company*

Vanessa Hitchcock, Tennessee  
nominated by *United Telephone Company*

Benjamin Nelson, Georgia  
nominated by *Public Service Telephone Company*

Kathryn Padilia, Nebraska  
nominated by *Great Plains Communications*

Melissa Rich, Missouri  
nominated by *Oregon Farmers Mutual Telephone Company*

Melanie Rivas, Idaho  
nominated by *Fremont Telcom Company*

Amelia Schroeder, Ohio  
nominated by *Columbus Grove Telephone Company*

Erica Vesco, Oklahoma  
nominated by *Salina Spavinaw Telephone Company, Inc.*

Shae Wallin, Minnesota  
nominated by *Sherburne County Rural Telephone Company*

As part of the weeklong curriculum, students took part in workshops, debates and lectures about the impending war, the media, politics, the judiciary system and telecommunications. "Walking workshops" allowed students the opportunity to explore D.C. neighborhoods and learn first-hand about the city. Students also visited the Korean and Vietnam War Memorials, the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, Arlington National Cemetery, the Newseum, the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress.



### **Capitol Hill Day**

On Thursday, students visited Capitol Hill and attended meetings with their representatives. Erica Vesco, nominated by Salina Spavinaw Telephone in Okla., was excited to meet with her representative, Brad Carson (D-Okla. 2nd), for the very first time. Vanessa Hitchcock, nominated by United Telephone Company in Chapel Hill, Tenn. reported that one of her favorite parts of the week was learning that her

representative (Rep. Bart Gordon) was concerned with the rural area she lives in. The students were escorted around the Hill by Joy Barksdale and Colleen vonHollen, generously on loan from Bennet and Bennet, PLLC and Steve Pastorkovich and Brenda Cordwell from the OPASTCO staff. In addition, Danny Riazzi of Riazzi, Rhyne and Goodson met up with the group in the morning for a tour of Library of Congress and the Supreme Court building.



### **Learning about Telecommunications**

On Friday, the last full day of the program, students attended a special telecommunications workshop held at the OPASTCO offices. Dave Lauerman and Joe Douglas from NECA discussed the importance of telecommunications in rural areas. They were joined by OPASTCO President John Rose and FRED Past President Hank

Buchanan. A special guest speaker, Lisa Zaina from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), also stopped by to speak with the students.



### **How about a little fun?**

There was also time for a little fun as students enjoyed a night at the theater where they saw the play, "1776". Fun, yet educational, the historic play was held at Ford's Theatre, the location where President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. For a change of pace, the students took on covert identities and became secret agents at the International Spy Museum during a free afternoon. Great food was also in abundance throughout the week as the group ventured to a variety of eating establishments. Students visited D.C.'s famous Chinatown for lunch and one evening joined NECA's Dave Lauerman from at the Taco House restaurant for dinner. Two students, Melanie and Amy, celebrated birthdays on the same day and the group celebrated the occasion with a cake and birthday wishes.



### **Saying Goodbye**

When the week was over, the students went home with a better understanding of how government works and how important the telecommunications industry is to the rural areas they live in. As the week concluded, Ben Nelson nominated by Public Service Telephone company in Reynolds, Ga. said it all, "Having to leave the people I've come to know and like over the past week (is my least favorite part of this trip). I wish we had one more week, but then I would probably just want one more again."