



THE ENERGY WAS ELECTRIC YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

By Ashley Eng

On an early July morning, seven high school students sponsored by Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative packed their bags and traveled to UW-Stout for a three-day adventure at this year's Youth Leadership Conference (YLC). Joining them on their journey north were six students sponsored by Richland Electric Cooperative. Along the way, the students enjoyed lunch (and Starbucks) together before heading to campus to start the fun-filled event.

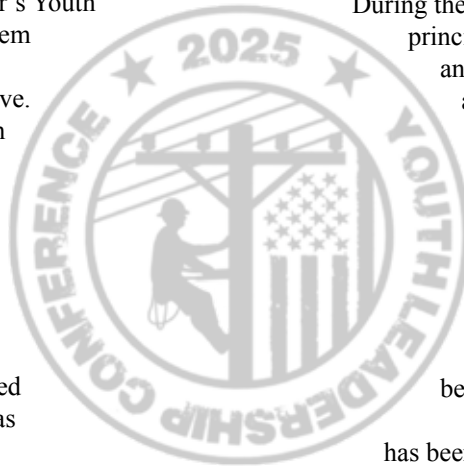
Upon arriving on campus, the excitement was infectious. As a first-time chaperone, I found myself to also be feeling the nerves some of the students felt, since this was also my first time experiencing dorm life, but I was so excited to see first-hand what the hype of YLC was truly about.

It quickly became evident to me that while I was there as an adult chaperone, the responsibility for the event lay in the hands of the youth board. This outstanding group, made up of six peers elected at last year's conference, embraced

their responsibility with positive attitudes and humor. They planned the events, introduced the motivational speakers, and were responsible for leading their District Meetings.

During these meetings, they discussed the cooperative principles, what makes cooperatives unique, and encouraged their fellow youth to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. These meetings weren't without some fun though as each group was tasked with creating a TikTok video focused on one of the seven cooperative principles. The youth board was also tasked with interviewing interested candidates for next year's youth board and selecting the candidates they felt would be the best fit.

Looking back, I now understand why this has been such an unforgettable experience for so many youth. Watching the students step out of their comfort zone, make new connections, and work together was a testament to the power of cooperative principles and the next generation of leaders.



Elected by their peers on the last day of YLC, the 2025 Youth Board (on left) stands beside the outgoing 2024 Youth Board (on right).

YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

DAY 1



Team-building activities started the day when students were divided into District Meeting groups where they were tasked with various challenges like stacking the tallest shoe tower and creating a group chant. After dinner, Hunter Gillet (pictured above) shared his powerful story of overcoming trauma following a devastating plane crash at age 18—an event that claimed the life of his best friend and left him critically injured. His words resonated deeply with everyone in the room, leaving a lasting impact. One student noted, “It was such a traumatic event, and to hear it from the survivor himself was even more touching and it shaped my perspective on life and really encouraged me to appreciate all of the things and people around me.”

DAY 2



Day two was packed with energy and excitement from sunup to sundown! The morning was kicked off with breakfast in the campus cafeteria before the first district meeting. During the meeting, the students learned more about co-ops and worked together to create a TikTok video. Later that morning, students gathered to hear from the animated motivational speaker, Craig Hillier (pictured above). After lunch, the learning continued with Ben Bella on his topic of “Safe Driving/ License to Live”, and Joe Mesec of WECA on “The Power of Advocacy”. After their final district meeting of the day, students dressed up for the formal etiquette dinner and ended the night with entertainment from hypnotist Al Snyder.



DAY 3

On the final day at UW-Stout, students gathered together one last time to watch the TikTok videos created by each district and hear from the candidates as they asked for their fellow students' votes for their seat on next year's Youth Board. After taking one last group photo, students packed up their dorm rooms and said good-bye to their new friends before making the journey home. Upon reflecting on the event, one student noted, "I'd say my favorite part of YLC was meeting all kinds of new and different people. Seeing how different people interact with others was sort of fascinating."



FUTURE LEADERS IN THE MAKING

Pictured below are students sponsored by Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative and Richland Electric Cooperative. Those sponsored by SREC (starting third from left): Abigail Jorgensen, Abby Heisz, Carson Eckert, Julia O'Dell, Lena Schmidt, Erika Droessler, and Abigail Droessler.



2025 MEMBER PHOTO CONTEST

This year's theme is **Homegrown**.

Our annual photo contest is underway! This year we are searching for photos that showcase local pride and sustainability. Whether it's tending to a garden, homesteading, or everyday rural life, we invite you to get creative and show us what "homegrown" means to you.

The winning photos will be featured in SREC publications, including our newsletter and this magazine. Members of all ages and skill levels are encouraged to enter!

Photo Contest Criteria:

- Taken in the SREC service area
- Horizontal (landscape orientation)
- May be in color or black and white
- High resolution (at least 300 dpi)
- Must own rights to photos

Photo Contest Rules:

- Members must own rights to photos.
- Three (3) photos per member will be accepted.
- A completed entry form must accompany each photo. For those members under 18 years old, a parent/guardian form must also accompany each entry.
- SREC employees will select final winners.

Deadline: October 30, 2025

For complete contest rules and entry form, visit our website at sre.coop/photo-contest.



Photo credit: Jamee Stanley, Soldiers Grove, WI



Photo credit: Kathy Miller, Cuba City, WI



Photo credit: Bobbi Gofus, Bagley, WI



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