

## COPPER VALLEY ELECTRIC



**By Sarah Jorgenson-Owen**

It would be easy to mistake the Idaho Consumer-Owned Utilities Association (ICUA) Youth Rally, offered by CVEA through the Community Foundation Scholarship Program, in partnership with the Alaska Power Association, as simply another summer camp for teens, but it is so much more! It is a leadership program, with an emphasis on educating high schoolers on the electric industry and the important role cooperatives play in rural communities.

Over the course of four and a half action-packed days, high school juniors & seniors attend breakout classroom sessions, listen to motivational speakers, hear from state political leaders, hone leadership skills, discover networking tools, and push the limits of their comfort zone. They learn it is ok to be vulnerable and take risks in a safe, welcoming environment.

The most unique and one of the most impactful aspects of the Youth Rally is that the entire agenda is designed and led by 2<sup>nd</sup> year student directors. These teen leaders craft amazing experiences, from the classroom breakout sessions and special speakers, to the team building games and field trips. It is an incredible way for students to develop teaching and leadership skills while under the care of chaperones. These high school juniors and seniors oversee the entire camp, all week long—and they love it! They relish in the opportunity to spread their wings and lead. It is also a chance for the incoming students to

observe what makes a good communicator, leader, and mentor by watching the student directors take charge of the agenda, team-building games, networking activities, dances, and more.

Even the classroom sessions are designed to make learning fun and engaging. Whether spinning the Wheel of Utility Jobs to discover the diverse career options available at utilities or playing a very spirited game of Jeopardy where all answers revolve around co-ops, students are being exposed to the many facets that make their hometown utility co-op special. The laughter filling the classrooms and halls is evidence of the well-developed curriculum and ingenuity that goes into each session.

The week is not all classrooms and lecture halls. Almost half the week is devoted to team-building activities, networking experiences, and field trips; like visiting the Idaho State Capitol, an afternoon at a local water park, and more than one dance party. Students are out the door early each morning and falling into bed exhausted each night, with never a dull moment. And in the precious minutes they are given for free time, they are bonding with students across the Northwest. Friendships are forged during this week that will often last a lifetime.

Copper Valley Electric Association, along with Homer Electric Association, sent a total of four students to this year's Youth Rally. I had a blast chaperoning our little delegation of Alaskans, and we spent an extra two days together making our way through Anchorage to Boise and onto Caldwell. The teens became fast

friends, and the group chat did not end when we parted ways at the airport. It was inspiring to watch their transformation throughout the week; from the timid entrance and first ice breaker game, to their dance moves and revelry at the last night's pizza party.

Part of the CVEA Community Foundation mission is to provide educational and leadership scholarships to students, which includes one Youth Rally scholarship per district to a high school sophomore or junior residing within the CVEA service territory. Through this scholarship, all expenses for the student to attend the Youth Rally – airfare, lodging, meals, travel expenses—are paid by the Foundation, so the student and their family does not need to pay anything out of pocket.

If you know a high school sophomore or junior looking to make a difference in their school or community, or who is

interested in pursuing a career in the electric industry, this Youth Rally is a perfect opportunity.

The 2024 CVEA Community Foundation Scholarship Program will be announced in December 2023. For more information on the ICUA Youth Rally and the CVEA Community Foundation Youth Rally Scholarship, please visit the scholarship section, under Community Support at [cvea.org](http://cvea.org).

If you have questions, please contact Sarah Jorgenson-Owen at 907-835-7004 or email [sjorgensonowen@cvea.org](mailto:sjorgensonowen@cvea.org). ■

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Opposite, Ryker Easton, Meriedi Morrison, Bella Smelcer, and Oliver Parrish, at the airport on their way to this year's Idaho Youth Rally. This two-day trip provided student's time to become fast friends. Above, Ryker and Bella were awarded CVEA Community Foundation Youth Rally Scholarships, which provided them an all-expense paid trip to the Idaho Youth Rally in Caldwell, Idaho. Top right, Bella, in her role as Student Director, introduced the Alaska delegation to the group of attendees during a series of ice-breaker games and activities. Right, Ryker participating in a team-building game; a fun, yet critical component of the Youth Rally as students learn how to communicate effectively, delegate, and assume leadership roles.

PHOTOS BY SARAH JORGENSON-OWEN

