

# Where are they now?

We contacted past Youth Tour delegates to ask them to reflect and tell *RM* readers what effect the trip had on their lives. We heard back from two sisters, Lacy, 2001, and Kari Gillespie, 2004, both sponsored by Marias River, Tory Lodmell of Big Flat and sponsored by MECA (2003) and Chelsey Sands, Lincoln Electric, 2002.

## Lacy Gillespie

While few people remember my winning essay or even the fact I went on the Youth to Washington Tour, it continues to affect me.

No other experience can come close to the eerie reflection of the memorials on the Potomac River on our night cruise and the feeling of being so close to history I could almost touch it. This trip was a chance for me to see history and experience the future of the United States. The Youth to Washington Tour brought me to a much deeper appreciation of what it means to be a citizen.

It was my first glimpse of what a political office is really like. While a political career is not my main goal in life, the trip to D.C. started me seriously considering serving in a political office in my wiser years.

I thank Marias River and the co-ops across the state that make this happen. This is one trip I won't ever forget.

Lacy is a junior in ag business at Montana State University. Summers she works as a reporter for the Cut Bank Pioneer Press.



Kari and Lacy with 4-H steers.

## Kari Gillespie

The tour increased my appreciation for our country's veterans and all of those who have fought for our freedom. To be surrounded by the thousands of tombstones in Arlington is an amazing sight and surreal feeling that made me

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realize the enormous sacrifice that families have made over the years. The expanse of hills covered with white markers reminded me that it took many courageous people to fight for that freedom that we enjoy.

While I may never fully comprehend our veterans' sacrifices, the "Youth to Washington" tour gave me a glimpse of unselfish Americans going the extra mile for their country and increased my appreciation for them, my country and our democratic process.

## Tory Lodmell

I met with the other youth delegates and began creating the bonds that hold many of us together to this day.

At the age of 17 and 18, we were given the opportunity to converse with Montana's most powerful politicians, Rep. Denny Rehberg, Sen. Max Baucus, and Sen. Conrad Burns. These three men helped to ignite the ambition that I have to this day.

I reflect on my trip to Washington every week. I am so grateful to have spent that time in such a breathtaking city as Washington, D.C., and in the presence of such extraordinary people, especially the most well rounded, adventurous and ambitious group of high school junior and seniors that this proud state has to offer — which was led by an inspirational person by the name of Sharon McDonald.



## Chelsey Sands

RM interviewed Cadet Chelsey Mae Sands via cell phone while she was sweating her way through the Army's intense Airborne School at Fort Benning, Ga., with no time to write back. She's entering her junior year at West Point, the U.S. Military Academy, trying to qualify for jump wings and the privilege of parachuting from military aircraft. Chelsey is a 2002 YT delegate from Lincoln Electric.

"The Youth Tour," she said, "was the

most influential event that made me think about a military career."

It wasn't an easy process, either. Chelsey came back from the tour to her senior year of high school already a year behind on the extensive application process to a military academy.

"I was stunned," said her mother, Jean Williams. "Chelsey never mentioned the military before the trip, but she came home inspired."

And the source of the inspiration? "I definitely give credit to Sharon McDonald,"

Chelsey said. "She encouraged me to

apply to West Point. She told me to go ahead and do it. The Youth Tour was such an incentive to get me going."



## Sharon Rocks!

One compliment comes up repeatedly from YT delegates past and present — the name Sharon McDonald. Sharon takes on the responsibility for two to three dozen delegates plus chaperones, travel, lodging, safety and a thousand details that consume her for more than eight months of the year. The result? We'll let the 2005 delegates tell you. Here are their comments from the after-action survey:

- Sharon was awesome, handling any complications with so much patience.
- Thank you so much, Sharon, for all you did to organize the trip and work out everything during the trip.
- You did such a good job planning and preparing things beforehand, things flowed smoothly and worked out details to finally get us home.
- I loved how we didn't have to worry about a thing!
- Sharon kept each of us completely informed; she was very organized and helpful!
- Sharon was awesome!

