



Washington Youth Tour participants from Oregon met with Rep. Greg Walden during their trip to Washington, D.C.

A Peek Behind the D.C. Curtain

Youth tour teen sees life from new perspective

By Pam Spettel

Since 1958, teens from rural electric cooperatives across the United States have gathered in Washington, D.C., for a week in June to learn more about their country and bring back inspiration to their communities. Triangle Lake School senior Vicente Mather was Blachly-Lane's 2017 Youth Tour representative.

Vicente is one of nine children of Mandy and Nolan Mather of Blachly. Two years ago, the family returned from Idaho to Blachly, where Mandy grew up. Vicente is proud to go to high school



Vicente Mather represented Blachly-Lane at the Washington Youth Tour in June.

where his mother was a leader and played on the league championship volleyball team.

"I have a great family with a cool story," Vicente says. "There are nine of us kids." His parents learned about Vicente's baby sister when she was in the NICU. After they found out she had six siblings, they adopted all of the children.

"They are so humble to give us a childhood. We came to live with my parents on Valentine's Day when I was in second grade. I was adopted a day after my birthday on November 13."

The Triangle Lake School

senior's interest in others spills out as he retells his Youth Tour experience. Descriptions of each monument he visited ends with a story about the people he met there.

At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Vicente met a veteran who had come to find the name of the first nurse to die in combat during the war. The veteran had worked alongside the nurse and came to pay his respects. Following the Marine Corps Sunset Parade at the Marine Corps War Memorial, Vicente talked with the color guard and learned the meaning of each part of their uniforms.

Honor Flight veterans were staying at the same hotel as Vicente, and he relished hearing them tell their stories. At the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Vicente realized his experiences make smaller moments seem much bigger, and the big moments smaller, providing him with a greater sense of perspective.

This year, Vicente and the 1,800 other Youth Tour teens and chaperones experienced something different than any other group.

"On our second-to-last day and just 3 miles from our hotel, members of the House and Senate were practicing for the annual Congressional baseball game and were shot at," Vicente says. "We think of these leaders as invincible, but they are not. They are real people. We could become one of these leaders some day. They were once teens who went to school just like we do.

"In D.C., we saw people making a change through their leadership. Back at home, we hear of the bigger events in D.C., but not the small ones. The small events are just as important. One of our senators has been working to save the Bonneville Power Administration. The senator knows we need to do what we can to keep rates low for people. Losing BPA would be bad for co-ops."

Triangle Lake School counselor Lisa Sequeira says of Vicente, "When I asked him why he wanted to go on this trip, without hesitation he responded with, 'You never know what you might discover from a new perspective.' He is the person initiating engagement with others to create a cohesive group. He is a people person to his core."

The active teen participates in athletics, student council, journalism and the arts at Triangle Lake. After his return from Washington, D.C., he worked a summer job for the Bureau of Land Management. Vicente plans to go to college after high school and hopes to one day work in photography and film. His



senior project—to make a positive influence in the negative world of social media—was approved the day before he left for Youth Tour.

"People spend an average of nine hours a day on the internet," says Vicente. "To make even one percent of that more positive makes a difference."

Vicente has special words for Blachly-Lane Co-op members.

"Thank you for the opportunity to educate myself about our country, about co-ops and how they came to be, and how they make the country better," he says. "Youth Tour is such a good program. People have the mentality to have hope for our nation. Blachly-Lane's members' support of Youth Tour gives the opportunity to build that hope in our community." ■

Above, Youth Tour participants traded state pins during their week.

Top, the Northwest delegation gathered at the World War II Memorial.