

Two delegates attend Girls State

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

This year two Holyoke High School juniors attended Colorado Columbine Girls State in Gunnison. The American Legion Auxiliary sponsored the girls' week of fun and education. Erin Vieselmeyer and Rachel Schneider report on their week.

By Erin Vieselmeyer

I attended Girls State in Gunnison June 10-15. I was in the city of Sara Orangetip and the county of Wishes.

I was the city councilwoman and the right hand to the mayor. In order to become a councilwoman, I had to give a speech and help others campaign for county and state offices.

Every morning and night we retired the flag. We listened to county officials talk about the process of becoming a county official, and how it's not always a glamorous job, but it is rewarding in the end.

My favorite parts were getting to know other girls from all over the state of Colorado and watching a talent show consisting of girls from each city. It was interesting to see everyone's talents including signing for a song, Taekwondo, Irish dancing, singing and comedians.

If given the opportunity, I would encourage others to accept the invitation. It is more than learning about government. It is meeting new people and making friendships that you will never forget.

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By Rachel Schneider

I thoroughly enjoyed going to Colorado Columbine Girls State June 10-15 in Gunnison.

When I first arrived in my city of California Sister, most people were very quiet and only got to know their roommates, if that. By the end of the day, we were all united by the boredom we had felt during the first session.

The councilors themselves admitted that the first day can be rather tedious as we went over all the rules and had several people talk to us about different things, and I think we would all agree that they were right.

One of the bright spots was Latoya Lucas, a woman who served in the army and had been severely injured during an attack. She has since recovered and spends much of her time as an inspirational speaker. I was totally inspired by what she had faced and the courage she had shown.

We ate dinner as a city and got to know each other much better. As we went to bed much too late that night, many of us were already close friends.

The next morning was a blur of guest speakers. Several Gunnison officials came, including the mayor and two county commissioners. We had a special video message from Representative Cory Gardner, who represents our district.

Representative Scott Tipton came in person to talk to us and answer our questions.

Afterwards, we broke off into political parties, which were Nationalists and Federalists. In my Federalist party, no one wanted to run for county offices because everyone wanted a state

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office, especially governor.

I was nominated for State Senate and unopposed in my party, which instantly put me on the ballot for the general election. Many people weren't so lucky, however, and out of all 17 people who ran for governor in my party, only one even made it on to primary elections.

After state elections, we dissolved back into our counties for open forum. Although we did talk about rather hot issues, our councilors made sure we didn't view it as a debate, just a safe place to share our ideas.

Comments ranged from personal stories about issues such as homosexuality to my anti MPAA ideals during a discussion about piracy.

Later, when dinner was over, we had extra time to work on speeches and campaign posters. Two hours later, as I surveyed my only campaign poster, I decided that I would benefit more from getting some sleep than I would from staying up until midnight to finish another one.

Tuesday was the day for primary elections. The entire morning was devoted to hearing campaign speeches and then eventually voting for who from our party we wanted to represent us in the general election.

The first part of the afternoon was spent in our first legislative sessions, where we thoroughly explored the process through which a bill becomes a law.

Then we moved on to whistle stop, which was play on the old tradition of political candidates riding from place to place on trains and getting out at every town to give a short speech. Although there were no trains on the campus of Western State College, we still had candidates for Governor, Lt. Governor, U.S. Senate and U.S. House move from county to county to give short speeches and answer questions.

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Although some of the questions were serious, others were much more lighthearted, such as requests to make Chewbacca noises or lie on the ground and sizzle like bacon.

After dinner we went to a flag etiquette presentation where we learned how to properly handle an American flag.

The next day we had speeches for the general elections first. I had to speak in front of my entire county, which was approximately 60 people, the largest crowd I have ever spoken in front of. It was great experience for me.

We then spent four hours in legislative sessions. We discussed bills during this time. Some were very serious, such as one about the legalization of polygamy and polyandry, others such as the Ten and Up Bill were rather silly.

The Ten and Up Bill was a response to a bill passed the week before at Boys State that combined Boys and Girls State into a single program called Citizens State. Girls would be able to enter in much the same way, but boys would need to be leaders in every club in their school as well as be able to provide intelligent conversation. If they lived up to this, they would be judged on appearance. Only someone with an appearance score of 10 would be allowed in.

The rest of the afternoon was spent with volunteer work, which ranged from tying blankets to dancing with senior citizens. I went to a museum a couple blocks away and dusted the exhibits.

It was very sad to encounter areas where there were layers and layers of dust over everything and where people obviously hadn't spent much time, but my group and I also had fun looking at all the creepy dolls in one of the buildings. As I have been able to spend some time volunteering at the Phillips County Museum, it was fun for me to get to see another museum from the inside.

After all of us returned from these activities we went to a talent show. Each of the 12 cities was allowed to send one representative. Some of the talents showcased include karate, stand-up comedy and Irish step dancing.

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Our program director also brought in some boys who we were allowed to ask questions of. We had a repeat of my county's whistle stop as we requested that one of them lie on the ground and sizzle like bacon. After the talent show, we all enjoyed ice cream.

On Thursday, we found out the results of all the elections. Unfortunately, I lost the State Senate race, but the girl who won had done some pretty amazing things and was one of the 13 finalists for Girls Nation. I knew she would do a great job representing our county.

The finalists for Girls Nation were chosen in our fourth and final legislative session, where close to 80 people vied for two spots.

Afterwards, we had free time until the banquet and inauguration, which gave us all an excuse to wear our prom dresses again. My parents were able to join me for the banquet and inauguration ceremonies. It was fun having them meet many of the friends I had made over the past few days.

That night, my entire city stayed up until about 1 a.m. talking and getting to know each other even better.

Friday morning was met with mixed emotions by everyone in my city. We were all excited to go home, but we also didn't want to say goodbye. In the short time that my city was together, we probably became the closest group at the conference.

For quite some time we will all probably continue to laugh whenever we hear the words salt and pudding in the same sentence, and the corresponding picture will probably be on the internet for years to come. We had one of the longest farewell city meetings of any group as we shared our favorite moment of Girls State and said our goodbyes.

I would like to thank the American Legion Auxiliary for providing such a great experience. I would also encourage anyone who is eligible for Girls State both next year and in years to come

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to take advantage of that invitation and not see it as something that simply looks good to colleges.

I regard this as one of the best experiences of my life and I hope that next year we can take more than just two people from Holyoke and that many more of my peers get to experience Girls State.

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