



# WHITE RIVER VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

## News Release

Contact:

Jamie Dopp, Manager of Marketing and Communications

O: (417) 335-9216, C: (417) 425-8739

jdopp@whiteriver.org

### For immediate release:

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## High School Juniors Win Scholarship and Trip to Washington, D.C. through their Local Co-op

**Branson, Missouri** – White River Valley Electric Cooperative (WRVEC) is proud to announce the winners of the 2026 Youth Tour essay and speech competition in which three area students will represent WRVEC and travel to Washington, D.C.

The 2026 winners are Amaria Wells (Ozark), Arianna Baker (Nixa), and Molly Leighninger (Nixa). The winners were chosen from a group of 13 finalists during WRVEC's annual Youth Tour banquet held on March 27 at the College of the Ozarks.

The other finalists were Gideon Baderman (Hollister), McKenna Clough (Bradleyville), Aubrey Fitzpatrick (School of the Ozarks), Cali Fronterhouse (Branson), Riley Holmberg (Forsyth), Chloe Maki (Branson), Ashlynn Markin (Blue Eye), Brittany Pech (Branson), Brooke Rapp (Nixa), and Elizabeth Smith (Ava).

High school juniors from participating schools in White River Valley Electric Cooperative's five-county service area submitted an essay or video that answered the question, "How will the Cooperative power my future?" At the banquet, finalists took a quiz about electric cooperatives followed by a presentation of their essays in front of friends, family, and a panel of judges.

"Our Cooperative believes that investing in area youth is one of the best ways we can serve our communities," said Nathan Stearns, Community Program's Coordinator for WRVEC. "These students have demonstrated strong leadership, curiosity, and a commitment to learning. The Youth Tour experience will open doors and spark ideas to help them see how they can play a role in shaping their communities. "



***Pictured Left to Right:** 2026 Youth Tour Winners, Amaria Wells (Ozark), Arianna Baker (Nixa), and Molly Leighninger (Nixa).*

The three finalists will join more than 2,000 other winners from electric cooperatives across the United States at the Youth Tour taking place in Washington, D.C. from June 14-20. Wells, Baker, and Leighninger will each receive an all-expenses paid trip to the Nation's Capital which includes touring national monuments, visiting elected officials, and experiencing the government in action. In addition, they will receive a \$1,500 scholarship from the Operation Round Up Trust Board and an invitation to attend WRVEC's annual meeting on August 21.

The annual Youth Tour contest is open to students who live and attend school in White River Valley Electric Cooperative's service area, or who have WRVEC service in their homes. Submissions for the 2027 program will begin next spring. For more information about the Youth Tour program, visit <https://www.whiteriver.org/community/youth-programs/youth-tour/>



**2026 Youth Tour Finalists Pictured Left to Right**

**Front:** Elizabeth Smith (Ava), Amaria Wells (Ozark), Ashlynn Markin (Blue Eye), Molly Leighninger (Nixa), Riley Holmberg (Forsyth), and Brittany Pech (Branson)

**Back:** McKenna Clough (Bradleyville), Aubrey Fitzpatrick (School of the Ozarks), Gideon Baderman (Hollister), Brooke Rapp (Nixa), Arianna Baker (Nixa), Cali Fronterhouse (Branson), and Chloe Maki (Branson)

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[White River Valley Electric Cooperative](#) is a [Touchstone Energy Cooperative](#) dedicated to ensuring our members receive safe and reliable service in their homes and businesses across five southwest Missouri counties including Ozark, Taney, Stone, Christian and Douglas.