



Meet the OEC youth!

Oakdale Electric Cooperative (OEC) sponsored 33 high school students, from 12 local high schools, to attend the 55th Annual Youth Leadership Congress (YLC) at UW-River Falls July 25-27. This three-day event is a unique opportunity for youth across Wisconsin to develop their leadership skills while learning the purpose, operation, and scope of cooperative businesses.



Three Fast Days of Fun! During their stay on campus, students got a taste of college life by residing in the dorms, attending lectures, and dining at the cafeteria. They listened to motivational speakers, including Craig Hillier, and participated in team-building games.

MY CO-OP



Presenting the Youth Board! Clay Lancour (far right) and Adrian Rodriguez (second to right), Nekoosa High School, along with Cole Parrish (far left), Necedah High School, were selected by their peers onto the Youth Board. They will plan and lead next year's YLC, and will also have the opportunity to attend the 2019 Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.



Ready to hit the road! Upon returning from YLC, all students have the opportunity to participate in the Oakdale Electric's essay scholarship program, which is funded from unclaimed capital credits. Interested in attending next year's Youth Leadership Congress? Contact Deana Protz, dprotz@oakdalerec.com, to learn how you can take part in this cooperative tradition.



Jessica was a junior attending Brookwood High School, when she followed in her brother's footsteps and signed up for Oakdale Electric Cooperative's Youth Leadership Congress (YLC). "I could do that!" stated the bubbly gal with the infectious smile. Jessica dove headfirst into the conference and actively participated in all sessions to further develop her leadership skills, learn more about co-ops, experience college life, and create lasting friendships with her peers.

"You create a bond with people quickly, especially when you share a dorm room with them," expressed Jessica. Fun fact: Roommate, Heather, stood up in Jessica's recent wedding.

Youth Leadership Congress is a unique program because it is overseen by a panel of six teenagers, also known as the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association (WECA) Youth Board. A one-year term on the Youth Board includes the responsibility of planning and implementing the following year's conference, educational opportunities focused on the cooperative business model, and a trip to Washington, D.C., to attend the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Youth Tour.

"Put in what you hope to take away and you will find success."

Not one to shy away from a challenge, Jessica pushed herself to step out of her comfort zone and run for a Youth Board position, which she successfully attained. Jessica didn't stop there. She set her eyes on a coveted position representing the state of Wisconsin on the NRECA Youth Leadership Council, and again rose to the top. It was an opportunity of a lifetime, and one that Jessica didn't take lightly.

"It was an honor to represent Oakdale Electric Cooperative on a national level," stated Dreier. "This experience developed me into the adult that I am today."

The drive to always reach for the next level of success, in all aspects of life, Jessica credits to Oakdale Electric Cooperative. The experiences provided by the co-op built her confidence, and turned this self-proclaimed introvert into an extrovert who can handle any uncomfortable situation thrown her way.

"I was challenged to speak in front of sizable crowds with no time to prepare," recalled Dreier. "When you push yourself out of your comfort zone, you grow as an individual."

Following Youth Leadership Congress, Jessica graduated from college with a degree in agri-business science, started a full-time career, and married her high school sweetheart, Mitch. The two became adult co-op members when they moved into the family farmstead that Mitch's grandparents lived in, which they renovated extensively inside and out. And to keep them company, and on their toes, Paisley, a lovable Australian shepherd, joined the family.

For most people, working full-time at Co-op Credit Union in Black River Falls, farming, and managing a household would keep them plenty busy. However, Jessica isn't your average, run-of-the-mill person. It's been eight years and she still hasn't forgotten the message spoken at the YLC opening ceremony: You're going to take away what you put in.

A KEY MESSAGE TO

*Jessica
Dreier*

You're going to take away what you put in. This message was spoken to Jessica (Brandsma) Dreier at the opening ceremony for the 2010 Youth Leadership Congress, and it's stayed with her well beyond the three days she spent at UW-River Falls for the annual event. Today, she's putting that message to work by serving the community through the fresh food and personal-care products she produces at Fawn Tracs Farmstead and sells at the Tomah Farmer's Market.

“Now is my chance to give back to the community,” stated Jessica, who credits the cooperative for planting the seed of wanting to make a difference. The answer in how to accomplish this task came naturally.

Jessica shared, “I have always planted a small continent of a garden annually, and gifted the extra vegetables to friends and family.” Mitch appreciated the money-saving aspect of gardening, while Jessica reveled in the health benefits of producing their own food. She elaborated further, “We know what’s in our meats, and what’s on our plants.”

What started out initially as a hobby has now turned into a passionate way of life. The garden expanded significantly in size, free-range chickens and ducks made themselves at home, and most recently, fruit trees were planted on the property, which sits adjacent to the Dreier Dairy Farm in rural Tomah. Jessica and Mitch are proud that what is on their plates at night is either produced at their farmstead, or they know exactly where and how it was produced.

Jessica’s cooking, baking, and canning skills developed (after a few candid trials and errors). If she couldn’t produce it, another local option was found to supplement her recipes. Shopping local is near and dear to the Dreiers’ hearts.

“I think every person should have access to affordable, safe, and healthy foods,” stated Jessica, “and I want to be able to provide this option locally.”



Jessica Dreier (then Jessica Brandsma), center, was elected to the Youth Board at the 2010 Youth Leadership Congress.

Before she could talk herself out of it, Jessica applied to sell her products at the Tomah Farmer’s Market under Fawn Tracs Farmstead. The name pays homage to Mitch’s side business, Deere Tracs Restoration, which specializes in classic tractor revitalization.

After pulling all-nighters in the kitchen the night prior, Jessica can be found at her booth on Saturday mornings with her mouthwatering baked goods, fresh eggs, and vegetables—canned and fresh—on display. She has expanded her merchandise to now include homemade lip balms and bar lotion, made with simple ingredients she trusts and by companies she values. Both products are made weekly to ensure their freshness.



Jessica and her husband, Mitch, (left) live on a renovated farmstead, where she tends to a large garden and free-range chickens, sources of products she sells at the Tomah Farmer’s Garden. She also sells handmade personal-care items such as lip balms.

MY CO-OP



The decision to commit to the Farmer's Market has proven to be the right one. "It's been so much fun meeting new people, and establishing a new group of friends," expressed Jessica. Her cup is full with knowledge that people are venturing down to the market to see her specifically through only word-of-mouth marketing. (You can now follow Fawn Tracs Farmstead on Facebook, or view the website, fawntracsfarmstead.com, for more information.) And when you do stop, you'll be greeted by a young woman with the same infectious smile she had as a high school youth.

Jessica prides herself on not being just a saleswoman. "I truly care about each and every customer, and their health," she stated. Fawn Tracs Farmstead is based on authenticity and fair prices. "I provide healthy products for customers to not only consume, but to use on their bodies, at a reasonable price," Jessica spoke.

Continuing to serve the community is at the heart of Jessica's imminent plans for the future, which include managing the Fawn Tracs Farmstead booth at the Tomah Farmer's Market through the fall season. Beyond that, she'll enjoy the ride and meeting new customers. "I believe that everything happens for a reason," Jessica relished.

The advice Jessica offers to current high school youth, and beyond, is simple. She smiled and stated, "Don't be afraid to be a Fruit Loop in a bowl of Cheerios." And of course, "Put in what you hope to take away and you will find success." —*Deana Protz*

JOIN US for Oakdale Electric Cooperative's
MEMBER APPRECIATION DAY
Saturday, October 13
7:30–11:00 a.m.
Hwy. PP, just north of Interstate 90/94

FOR ALL:

- Breakfast by Tomah Lions Club
- Co-op Educational Tables
- Flu Shots
- Gift Bags
- Oakdale Credit Union
- Operation Round Up®
- Photo Booth
- Popcorn
- Prizes
- Touchstone Energy®

FOR KIDS:

- Bounce House
- Caricature Artist
- Corn Pool
- Craft Time Studio
- Face Painting
- Giant Games
- Pedal Pulling
- And more!


Bruce Ardel, General Manager

P.O. Box 40, Oakdale, WI 54649
 608-372-4131 • 800-241-2468
info@oakdalerec.com

Deana Protz, Editor



Oakdale Electric Cooperative

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