

Boys State delegates learn 'what government really means'



Staff members of the Tar Heel Boys State Program at Wake Forest University.

BY MELDE RUTLEDGE
THE CHRONICLE

Last week marked the 62nd session of the American Legion Tar Heel Boys State program, held at Wake Forest University.

Boys State was formed in the 1930s by the American Legion, a patriotic, veterans organization with nearly 3 million members, in all states except Hawaii, to teach young men the basic principles involved in successful management of a democratic society.

During the course of the week, rising high school seniors from across the state experienced "what government truly means."

"What they do is form their own cities, government and vote just like a state government is set up," said Henry Wilson, chairman of the Tar Heel Boys State Committee, who has been with the program for 15 years.

Upon arrival to Boys State, which is held on college campuses, military reservations, 4-H camps and other facilities, the young men are assigned to one of two political par-

ties: the Nationalists or the Federalists. Citizens then involve themselves at the precinct, city, county, judicial circuit, senatorial, legislative district or state levels.

They wake up at 7 each morning and go to sleep at 11:30 each night. Between that time, about half of the program hours are devoted to government policy and practice. Classes consist of law, civil service, election and parliamentary procedures.

"I gained a deeper understanding of government," said Reggie Mathis, the elected governor of the Tar Heel Boys State, from Wilmington. "I value the work that veterans have put into this program a lot more, and (am) real proud to be part of it."

Only males who have successfully completed their junior year of high school - and have at least one semester of high school remaining - with outstanding qualities are considered eligible for Boys State.

Anyone who has previously attended a Boys State is not eligible to attend a second session. No one can be denied because of his family income. Fees are paid by American

Legion posts or other community-minded organizations, with little or no expense to him or his family. There are nearly 15,000 posts worldwide.

Each year, Boys States select two outstanding participants to represent them at the American Legion Boys Nation in Washington, D.C., which is designed to give an understanding of the methods of federal government. Also a week-long event, activities include the organization of party conventions, meeting the president and nomination and election of a Boys Nation president and vice president.

"The American Legion-sponsored week at Boys' State encouraged me to discover an intense passion for my state and my country," said David Horton, from the Boys State of South Carolina. "This Americanism program changed my life, and I am inspired by the assurance that it will affect many more young people in the future."

Prominent graduates of Boys State include Michael Jordan, Neil Armstrong and former President Bill Clinton.



Some of the funeral directors who participated in the motorcade were: W.H. Bryant, Cedric Russell, David Moten, David Lawson, Allan Jones and Michael McClelland.

Motorcade

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took part in the rally, to help spread the End the Violence message.

Bernardeane H. Moton, public relations director for the Funeral Directors and Morticians Association of North Carolina Inc., said, "We want to send the message that we want to preserve our youth by keeping them safe. The only way we can do that is to end this violence. We know we're going to eventually bury people but we don't want to bury anyone we don't have to (and) until it's time. ... Our biggest concern is the way that we have all this crime, black on black, Hispanic, senseless crime, accidents, kids speeding, anything that's out of the norm. We know that sometimes death would occur when a person is young, but we don't really want to bury anybody until it's really absolutely necessary."

... As a body, the Funeral Directors and Morticians (Association) of North Carolina, we will be here to greet everybody but we also want people to know we want this stopped. We want the clergy, the community and everybody as a whole to join with us and stop this."

Lee Perry, a former president of the FA and MA of NC, said, "We thought it would be a good symbol to do this in order to maybe prevent some crime in some areas and show some of our younger people what ultimately happens when you do this. ... Last weekend I had a young fellow 25 years old I had to do (bury). It was the same situation,

violence, people shooting each other. We just thought this would be a great way to open our convention (held at the Adam's Mark Hotel and Benton Convention Center June 18-21)."

Sharee Fowler of Family Services in Winston-Salem said, "Basically, I'm here representing Family Services and our commitment to ending violence in all forms, recognizing that youth violence and family violence and sexual violence do not exist in vacuums, but they are all interrelated, interconnected; and show the community that we have a zero tolerance here for violence."

Thomas Harbor, embalmer and funeral director at Forsyth Funeral Home, said he was taking part in the motorcade because "The funeral home is in a high-crime area, and we need to promote everything we can to save people's lives."

Jerry Bennett, a volunteer at Beasley Funeral Services, said, "So much crime, and so much drugs, I'd like to see it (cease). ..."

Lucius Simmons, a volunteer at Beasley Funeral Services, said "I'm taking part in this because there's so much violence in Winston-Salem ... as a matter of fact, the whole state of North Carolina. We're trying to do something positive to let younger people especially realize that the way they are going now is in the wrong direction. We're trying to do something now to show them where they are making a mistake and turn them around in some kind of way. Hopefully this will open their eyes and let them see that drugs is no way to win; the only thing you can do is go down. We're trying to do the best

we can to try to let them understand that there's a better way in life than with drugs."

Cedric Russell, a funeral director at Russell Funeral Home, said, "We wish to try to make some type of strong statement to young people that violence is truly not the answer to any type of disagreement that may possibly come forth; that we all are coinhabitants of this planet, and we should learn how to live together. And we hope that the show of the funeral directors today with the caskets, the hearses - that indicates what can be the final ride for them - will maybe change their heart to get away from this type of behavior and learn how to live in peace and love together."

Robert Williams, funeral home assistant with Graham Funeral Home in Mocksville, said, "It was a great idea to do something like this. Funeral homes, especially black funeral homes, don't never get together to hardly do anything - like was said before, just wait till people die. They're showing a greater interest in the community by doing this. ... We bury so many young people. In fact, now we bury more young people at a younger age than we did before. Younger people really think death is for older people.... It doesn't work like that. They're just killing each other. I believe something like this, if they really stop and look ... to understand what's going on, it might help. If it doesn't, you know, you gave it a try. And that's the best you can do."

The Center for Community Safety in Winston-Salem co-sponsored the event.

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