

National Youth Congress

This year I was selected to represent the Northwest Region at the 2008 National Youth Congress in Boston. Not really knowing much about this opportunity beforehand, I'd like to provide an overview that tells people what to expect. The National Youth Congress (NYC) brings together Pony Club leaders age 18 and older for two days of policy making and Pony Club camaraderie. Each region selects a delegate. It gives youth an opportunity to directly affect Pony Club policy, as after all, it is a youth organization. One thing this program does is connect the delegates with the Board of Governors (BOG) so that our personal and regional ideas, or concerns, can be brought to their attention. The BOG is the group that determines major Pony Club policy regarding rating, rallies, etc. This year we broke into groups and had a member of the BOG sitting at each table. The members then asked questions that they had and simply listened while we shared our opinions and discussed the issues among ourselves. After the board brought their questions to us, we were able to bring our proposals to them.

Emphasis is placed on leadership and teamwork as these skills are developed all throughout Pony Club and are essential for making decisions. We put these skills to the test when we, as a group of 42 delegates, had to come up with one policy to present to the BOG. The policy that a select group presented was a Junior National Board that would work as a venue to get the youth voice heard. This was very well received by the BOG.

In addition to a policy, each delegate developed a project to bring home to his or her region or club. Coming from a small club made up of D members, and myself, I chose to do a "Pin Pal Program." This entails a pen pal/pin exchange. The first will be between my club (Olympus) and a fellow delegate's club in the Big Sky Region. My goal is to provide encouragement for the younger members by connecting them to others nationwide with similar interests. I hope that they can encourage each other to rate, rally and take advantage of more of the great opportunities available through Pony Club.

The final element of the NYC was the alumni presentations. Each year successful Pony Club alumni are inducted into the USPC Academy of Achievement. This year we had six alumni from a variety of fields including a veterinarian, lawyer, and professor. Each person gave a very inspiring presentation about their life and how Pony Club was essential to their success. This was my favorite part of the NYC experience. Their inspiration and faith in all of our success meant a lot to each of us, most of who are college students worried about the "real world."

I hope that this provides everyone with a better picture of the National Youth Congress. I would encourage each interested person to apply – the experience was more than I ever imagined. Please feel free to email me at any time with questions.

Catherine Hennessey
HA Olympus Pony Club
wizaloo@yahoo.com