

Girls State

By LYDIA FREEMAN

"I think Girls State gives people a new perspective on politics. You never hear anything good in the media unless it's something about a new debt resolution or someone got elected. But there is a lot of good in politics that doesn't have the lights shone on it. A lot more goes on, and I am so excited that we can be a part of one the greatest countries in the world created by such great minds."



These are the words of Shelby Locke, the newly elected governor of Girls State. It is a testament to two truths: first, it affirms the work of our legislators, and secondly, it shows the importance of Girls State. It shows that this program is teaching young people the importance of our government.

"Two types of girls are at Girls State," said Bonnie Crews, the current director. "first there are those who are interested in politics. But many of the girls don't know why they are there. They may come in skeptical, but they leave believers."

Over 600 girls attend Girls State. They are divided into 14 cities; each city is composed of a hall of girls and functions like a state would. The girls run for offices, create bills, and build friendships.

"The first day you are on the same floor as your city, and everyone is getting settled in," Locke said. "We sit down and figure out names and a slogan for our city. I was sitting next to a girl who is now my dear friend, Kim Pattinger. She and I got up and began to play a game called Little Sally Walker. We ran around, met people, and played games. Afterwards, our city became the closest city ever. We didn't have drama. I can't even begin to describe how much I love my city."

Locke quoted herself from a recent speech she gave to the American Legion Auxiliary. "I have two brothers normally, but I left Girls State with 32 sisters."

"It's not just a camp experience," Crews stated. "I know lots of people who send their kids to summer camps. This goes deeper. We throw in quite the dash of patriotism. We are sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary. And we hope these girls support our troops."

The girls learn about government by being a government. Both the House and Senate of Virginia support Girls State. Susan Clark Schaar and her staff provide many instructions and resources.

"Girls State is a hands-on learning experience," said Crews. "They learn about government by doing it. The most valuable thing they take away is self-confidence. They go through the process of creating a city, working on things they are passionate about. They get to showcase their passions and talents to others."

Girls State also teaches girls how to lose with grace. Crews shared a favored mantra, "If you're not prepared to lose, you don't deserve to win."

Locke is the junior leader of her youth group, she plays violin in her orchestra, she is a varsity all-season runner, volunteers with cancer foundations, and now she is the governor of Girls State.

"I ran for my city and for my dad. My dad died from brain cancer, I used his death as my platform to talk about healthcare. My hall actually raised over a hundred dollars for the Brian Bedell Foundation, a brain cancer research foundation. The Girls State foundation matched that, and we were able to give over two hundred dollars in the name of my dad."



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Currently, Locke dreams of being a doctor.

"After I've lived that dream, I want to be a delegate for a district," said Locke. "I hope to be in politics one day because of Girls State."

Bonnie Crews said that the mission of girls state was to turn out young women who will make a difference in the world.

"Yes, these girls are passionate and smart and talented enough to help solve world problems," Crews affirmed.

Girls State is empowering girls through teaching them how to make a difference through our government, by developing their leadership skills, and bringing them together with friends who encourage and inspire them. [V]