



A Community of Volunteers Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families

Texas Bluebonnet Girls State, a mythical and symbolic 51st state, is one of the premiere programs of the American Legion Auxiliary, besides the valuable and important programs for our veterans, their families, our youth and our communities. This year marks the 80th session of Girls State with young ladies attending from the Rio Grande, to the Panhandle, down to the Golf Coast and from everywhere in between. It was a fantastic week for all involved. This year over 600 young ladies converged on June 16, 2024 at Texas Lutheran University to participate in this program.

Girls State was founded to educate our young ladies on the privileges, responsibilities and rights of citizenship and to instill in them a sense of personal obligation that goes along with being a citizen. The American Legion Auxiliary wants to teach our youth about the workings of our form of government in a realistic setting by having them actually participate in the election and debate process which includes a mock legislature where they can write and debate bills.

Without our important sponsors like you,

New Braunfels Evening Lions Club

we would not be able to implement this program alone. It is YOUR generous and unwavering support that has afforded this opportunity to so many young ladies over the more than 20 years you have been a sponsor. You have been an important and dedicated partner who has never wavered when we have asked for your assistance. We wish to express our sincere gratitude for helping us make this program possible.

We begin our report with our annual Girls State Orientation which was held on Saturday, May 18, 2024 at the Walton F. Hoffmann Memorial American Legion Post 179. Our Citizens, their families, our sponsors and our counselors were invited to share in this day of celebration with refreshments and a brief program. Citizens were recognized with a "Good Citizen Citation," letter and a gift, and sponsors and counselors were recognized with "Certificates of Appreciation" along with a letter of thanks and gratitude. Counselors were also presented a special gift. Sponsors in attendance were introduced to their Citizens, and parents were recognized with a round of applause for raising such wonderful daughters. Those who were unable to attend were mailed their certificates and letter.



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American Legion Auxiliary Girls State Orientation
Saturday, May 18, 2024 3:00 pm
Walton F. Hoffmann Memorial American Legion Post 179

- Welcome** Auxiliary President Anita Bishop
- What is Girls State?** Girls State Chairman Sandi Schendel
- Thank you to our counselors** Girls State Chairman Sandi Schendel
- John Paul II Catholic High School Director of Counseling Services Dr. Sherry Garrett
New Braunfels High School Career Center Advisor Jenise Horner
Davenport High School Academic and Career Advisor Kayla Beyer
- Presentation of Girls State Citizens and their Sponsors** Anita Bishop, Sheila Warden, Sandi Schendel

New Braunfels Evening Lions Club #1578 President Joe Vasquez, Jr. and Edward Nolte

- Brynneleigh Miller, John Paul II Catholic High School Parents Toni and Steve Miller
Charlotte Anderson, John Paul II Catholic High School Parent Sarah and Garrett Anderson
Claire Bailey, John Paul II Catholic High School Parents Susan and Lee Bailey

Downtown Rotary Club of New Braunfels President Douglas Harrison and Donations Chair James Ingalls

- Natalie Ballenger, New Braunfels High School Parent Karen and Thomas Ballenger
Reese Hickingbottom, Davenport High School Parents Charlotte and Clark Hickingbottom
Alternate Maricela Aguilar, Davenport High School Parents Roxanne and Robert Aguilar
Tatiana Sunstrom, Davenport High School Parents Terri Sunstrom
Alternate Taryn Welch, Davenport High School Parents Pat and Terry Welch

Garden Ridge Lions Club President Steve Gallets

- Atahlah Richardson, Davenport High School Parents Onima and Leon Richardson
Alternate Ann Kulpa, Sherwood, Davenport High School Parents Dawn and Paul Kulpa
Hannah Lister, Davenport High School Parents Gina and Zach Lister
Alternate Jazzlynn Vo, Davenport High School Parent Stacy Nguyen
Maeson Frazier, Davenport High School Parent Alicia Frazier
Alternate Jozie Steel, Davenport High School Parents Jojie Mae Knochauer and Jerry Steele

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American Legion Riders Director Jay Grady

Marie Eberly, John Paul II Catholic High School

Megan Clare Ohnheiser, John Paul II Catholic High School

Susanna Bain, John Paul II Catholic High School

Parents Rachel and Matthew Eberly

Parents Lavonne and Wade Ohnheiser

Parents Susie Bain, Paul Bain & Dana Garcia

Walton F. Hoffmann Memorial Unit 179, American Legion Auxiliary, President Anita Bishop

Aleena Guerra, New Braunfels High School

Parents Luz and Joel Guerra

San Antonio City Wide National Society of Black Engineers Jr. Chapter President Sammy Draper, II and Ms. Devethia Thompson

Victoria Scott, Davenport High School

Alternate Sally Boatright, Davenport High School

Parents Cheryl and Robert Scott, Jr.

Parents Sarah and Steven Boatright



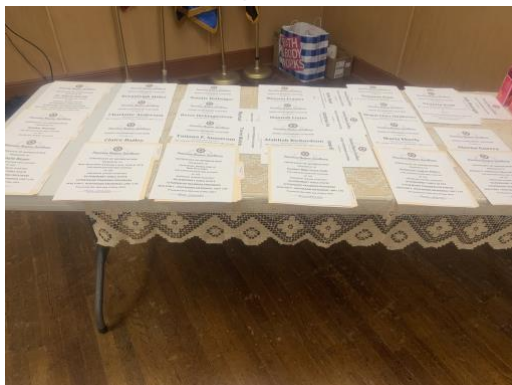
Our orientation sign in table included photos and a Girls State manual from Girls State Chairman Sandi Schendel's Girls State experience when she attended in 1969. President Johnson and Lady Bird were special guests. Our girls were each placed in a "city;" Sandi's was in City G Galahad's Grotto.



Each of our Girls State Citizens and Alternates received a letter of congratulations with their sponsors contact information and a Good Citizen Citation. Our wonderful Counselors and Sponsors received a Certificate of Appreciation along with a letter of thanks and gratitude.

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Certificates and letters were presented to Girls State Citizens, Counselors and Sponsors.



Girls State Chairman Sandi Schendel presents a Good Citizenship Citation to Natalie Ballenger, sponsored by the Downtown Rotary Club of New Braunfels. She had to leave the orientation to get to work prior to the program beginning.



Pictured (left to right) are Auxiliary President Anita Bishop, Auxiliary Girls State Chairman Sandi Schendel and Girls State Citizens Susanna Bain, Megan Clare Ohnheiser, Maria Eberly, Brynnleigh Miller, Claire Bailey, Aleena Guerra, and Atahliah Richardson.

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Girls State Citizen Aleena Guerra stands with her sponsors, the Walton F. Hoffmann Memorial Unit 179 American Legion Auxiliary. Left to Right are Aleena Guerra, Secretary-Treasurer Mary Jane Repp, Sgt. At Arms Nancy Hartfiel, Member Ria Gray, Member Angie Velasquez, President Anita Bishop, and Members Barbara Clopper, Betty Kreutler, and Deb Chappell.



Pictured L to R are Girls State Citizen Megan Claire Ohnheiser, Chairman Sandi Schendel, Girls State Citizen Megan Eberly and sponsor American Legion Rider Dale Bennett.



Pictured L to R are Chairman Sandi Schendel, Citizens Brynnleigh Miller and Claire Bailey, and New Braunfels Evening Lions Sponsor Edward Nolte.

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Sunday, June 6, 2024 our 14 Girls State Citizens arrived at Texas Lutheran University where they checked in and were directed to their mythical city where they met their fellow citizens. Those girls applying for the Samsung Scholarship turned them in. Our Citizens were split up between 14 different cities labeled City A to City N. Staff in each city consisted of one senior and two junior counselors who helped the girls get settled in to their dorm rooms with their new roommates. It is customary NOT to put girls from the same school in the same city so that the girls can meet others from throughout the state, but doesn't take the girls long to make new friends in their new cities.

All staff was on deck to assure a smooth move in of the 600 girls. Girls State staff includes Director Lori Swan, Co-Director Connie Bridges, Associate Director of Administration Ann Doan, Associate Director of Personnel Karen Rodriguez, Associate Director of Programs Stephanie McDonald, Associate Director of Education Katie Stewart, three nurses, four program support associates, 8 House and Senate directors, 7 Education/County Coordinators, 4 bank associates, 2 party leaders, 5 talent associates, 4 Girls State Store associates, 1 transportation associate, 3 marketing associates, 14 senior and 28 junior counselors as well as several ancillary associates.

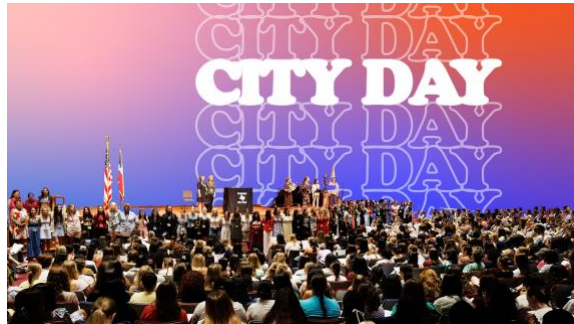
Daily activities included marching to the flag, raising the United States and Texas flags, and reciting the pledge of allegiances. Patriotism and Americanism are two principles that were stressed. The girls quickly learned that wherever they marched in unity they sang, and they quickly learned the songs.



Charlotte Anderson, from John Paul II Catholic High School and sponsored by New Braunfels Evening Lions Club #1578, sent us some pictures during her busy week. Here we see the chapel at Texas Lutheran University lit up at night. Beautiful.

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On City Day, our Citizens were excited and thrilled to assemble with 600 others where presentations were made by Girls State Director Lori Swan and Co-Director Connie Bridges as well as Ann Doan, Associate Director of Administration. This was followed by several speakers who addressed the citizens to encourage and inspire the Citizens for the week. They included:

President of Texas Lutheran University Dr. Debbie Cottrell encouraged the citizens by stating "*I congratulate you for accepting the nomination to be here, to focus and grow, laugh and learn, take advantage of the challenges, and go home a better person.*"

American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Texas, President Holly Heatly told citizens "*This week will take you out of your comfort zone but you will leave this place fearless, confident, and ready to take on the world.*"

The Honorable Donna Dodgen, Mayor of Seguin, addressed some of her challenges as mayor and the skills she used to overcome them to the Citizens. She emboldened them with her comment "*You can do anything that you want to, and you can do anything together.*"

Following the speakers, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House announced the Floorleaders for the 80th session which included National and Federal Party Leaders for the Senate and the House of Representatives. Citizens then returned to their individual cities to draft their city charters and elect city officials as well as take part in their first House and Senate sessions. They also began to learn about the legislative process through the legislative staff.