

2026 Girls State Program
Walton F. Hoffmann Memorial Unit 179
American Legion Auxiliary
September 10, 2026

As we present our final report on Texas Bluebonnet Girls State 2026, we extend our sincere gratitude to your organization – **the New Braunfels Evening Lions Club**. Your generous and continued support was instrumental in making this year's program a resounding success. Your donation provided full room, board, and transportation for **Leah Dorsey, Stephanie Padalecki and Tinsley Blymer from John Paul II Catholic High School** to attend the week-long program June 14–20, 2026 at Texas Lutheran University. A small portion covered reception expenses.

We look forward to continuing this program, given the tremendous benefits and opportunities it offers our Citizens. We currently support four high schools across the Comal and New Braunfels ISDs, with the potential to expand based on applicant interest and external non-profit funding.

The program's transformative impact is evident when these young women return with renewed passion, ambition, confidence, and a drive to serve. One can see their commitment during the application process, where candidates consistently showcase exceptional leadership across their academic, civic, service, and faith-based pursuits and interests.

What Your Citizens Learned

- Citizenship and Civic Duty: Gained an understanding of the rights, duties, privileges and personal responsibilities of American citizenship.
- Government Simulation: Practiced daily responsibilities of elected officials across city, county, and state levels.
- Leadership and Civil Discourse: Cultivated leadership skills, public service values, and respectful debate in a collaborative environment.

Program Structure and Hands-On Experience

- Simulated Governance: Stepped into functional roles within the mythical 51st state of Texas Bluebonnet Girls State.
- Legislative Action: Campaigned for office, drafted legislation, and debated bills in the House of Representatives and Senate.

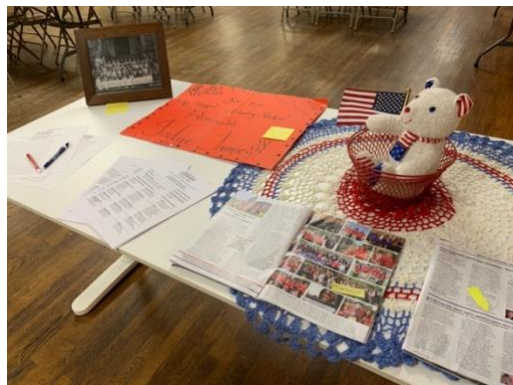
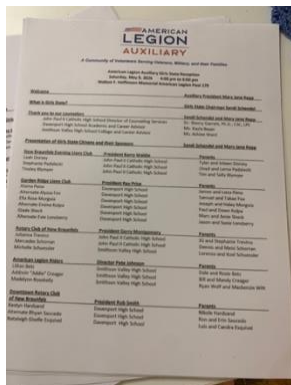
Distinguished Speakers & Alumni

- Prominent Speakers: Engaged with key civic leaders including Texas Lutheran University President Dr. Debbie Cottrell, Seguin Mayor Donna Dodgen, Girls State Director Lori Swan, , 466th Judicial District Court Judge Stephanie Bascon and others. Notable past speakers included Senator John Cornyn, Governor George W. Bush and President George H.W. Bush.
- Inspiring Alumni: Joined a legacy of trailblazers such as former Texas Governor Ann Richards, Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn, Judge Bea Ann Smith and others, many who return to mentor participants.

Alumni Impact and Career Aspirations

- Community Leadership: Return home as confident advocates, active leaders and mentors, inspiring peers across their schools, workplaces, and local organizations.
- Role models: Share their leadership journeys with family, peers and civic organizations.
- Career Paths: Some pursue influential careers across local, state, and federal government, as well as civic, military, and non-profit sectors.

We hosted our annual Girls State Reception Saturday, May 9, 2026 at the Walton F. Hoffmann Memorial American Legion Post 179, bringing together Citizens, counselors, sponsors, and families. Following a warm welcome with light refreshments, we recognized our high school counselors and sponsors with Certificates of Appreciation and Letters of Gratitude for their invaluable support. Highlights of the afternoon included presenting Good Citizen Citations to our Citizens, followed by photo opportunities with their sponsors. Families were recognized for raising and nurturing outstanding, talented young leaders.



Left is our reception program. Right is our sign in table with a campaign poster from a former Girls State Citizen.



Right are the Good Citizenship Citations, Certificates of Appreciation and Letters of Gratitude that were presented to Citizens, counselors and sponsors.



Left ,American Legion Auxiliary President Mary Jane Nalley sets out snacks for guests. Right, Citizens, parents and guests listen to presentations.



(Photo left) Left and right are **New Braunfels Evening Lions Club** sponsors Bob Oldham and Skip Nolte. Center back is Pete Johnson representing the American Legion Riders Post 179.
 (Photo right). **John Paul II Catholic High School Counselor Dr. Sherry Garrett** (right back in pink blouse) sits with parents and Girls State Citizens.
 Counselors assistance is vital and essential to our program.



(Photo left) **New Braunfels Evening Lions Club Members Bob Oldham and Skip Nolte** receive a Certificate of Appreciation and Letter of Gratitude from Auxiliary President Mary Jane Nalley (left) and Girls State Chairman Sandi Schendel (right).
 (Photo right) **Lions Bob Oldham and Skip Nolte** pose with one of their three Girls State Citizens – **Stephanie Padalecki** from John Paul II Catholic High School.

Stephanie Padalecki tells us about Girls State “Good morning, this is Stephanie Padalecki, a citizen of Girls State sponsored by the New Braunfels Evening Lions Club. I’m reaching out to express my gratefulness in being able to be a part of this program. I had an amazing time as I got to learn about government in a new way while being surrounded by the leaders of tomorrow. All of the girls had unique views shaped by intricate personalities, yet they were all so kind and approachable. I’m thankful that I was able to make so many new friendships and experience government in this fashion. I am waiting for the official photos to be posted on the website so I can provide you with photos of me giving my speech to the entire assembly, but I just wanted to reach out today in thankfulness and as a starting point. Thank you.”

(Sponsored by the New Braunfels Evening Lions Club)

Photos below show Stephanie's week at Girls State including photos when she campaigned for Commissioner of Agriculture . She was also a member of the Federal Party.



Stephanie gives a campaign speech for the state office of Commissioner of Agriculture. Right, she hugs her political opponent.



Stephanie made many new friends at girls state as she poses with other Citizens.



Pete Johnson, with the American Legion Riders Post 179, is presented a Certificate of Appreciation from President Nalley and Chairman Schendel. The Riders sponsored Citizens Lillian Betz, Addison Creager and Madelynn Rosekelly, juniors at Smithson Valley High School.

Lillian Betz, Smithson Valley High School – *“Ms. Schendel, thank you so much for allowing me to share this experience and culture. Although during initial arrival of Girls State I was wary that I wouldn’t fit in, but after 24hrs I grew to love the place as a second community. TBGS was genuinely such a surreal experience that I will forever cherish, appreciate and reminisce about. Thank you again for the pleasure of sharing this venture; it will always be remembered. Best regards, Lillia Betz”*

(Sponsored by the American Legion Riders Post 179)



Lillian enjoys a meal in Hein Dining Hall and outside of the Alumni Student Center with members of her city as well as new friends.



Lillian (center) points to her campaign poster to vote for “A Better City B Starts here! Vote Betz Bubbles” and (right) she poses with a member of her City B.



(Left) Citizens pose in front of the TLU statue of Lucky the Bulldog and (center) talent contestants pose with Phyllis Janie, Talent Coordinator, as they prepare for the annual talent show.
(Far right) Another photo with many of the Citizens at Texas Bluebonnet Girls State and the new friends Lillian has made throughout the week.



American Legion Auxiliary President Mary Jane Nalley (left) and Girls State Chairman Sandi Schendel present a Good Citizen Citation to Citizen **Juliana Trevino** sponsored by the **Rotary Club of New Braunfels**.



(Photo left). President Nalley and Chairman Schendel present Good Citizenship Citations to **Kestyn Hardsand** (left) and **Natalie Giselle Esquivel** (right), both students at Davenport High School, sponsored by the **Downtown Rotary Club of New Braunfels**. (Photo right) President Nalley and Chairman Schendel award Good Citizenship Citations (left to right) to **Giada Sheck, Ella Rose Murguia, and Alaina Pena**, students at Davenport High School, sponsored by the **Garden Ridge Lions Club**.

Below are comments and photos from some of our Girls State Citizens:

Alaina Pena, Davenport High School – *This is just a snippet of the fun I had at Bluebonnet Girls State! I met so many beautiful and accomplished young women that are going to be on my heart for a lifetime. I've learned my voice and built my confidence all thanks to the wonderful staff and sponsors that supported my journey. What an experience that has taught me endurance and strength. Thank you! I was in City N Narwhals and I ran for County Justice of the Peace. I won primaries but unfortunately lost in the general election. I was so proud of myself for stepping out of my comfort one and also submitting legislation!"*

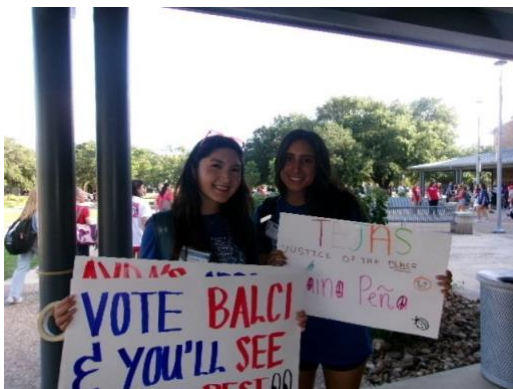
(Sponsored by the Garden Ridge Lions Club)



Alaina was sponsored by the **Garden Ridge Lions Club**.



Left are Citizens in Alaina's city coming together for a municipal or legislative session.
Right, she poses with other Citizens at the American flag which was raised and lowered daily in special patriotic ceremonies.



(Left) Alaina campaigns for Justice of the Peace in her city.
(right) She poses with another new Citizen friend.

Madelyn Rosekelly, Smithson Valley High School – *“Girls state taught me that spaces full of women are possible despite structures that exist to prevent them. Characteristics like being “emotional” that I thought made me less than were the exact trait that brought me and some amazing girls together and drove us to write bills and pursue positions in office. Even outside of the senate and house, I met incredible girls that encouraged to try things I had thought about before but never had the community to achieve it.”*

(Sponsored by the American Legion Riders Post 179)



Left, we see Madelyn giving a campaign speech and right she holds up her campaign poster for Railroad Commissioner asking "What would Thomas do?" Vote for Madelyn, of course. Madelyn was sponsored by the **American Legion Riders Post 179**.

Addison Creager, Smithson Valley High School – *"Girl's State was truly a once in a lifetime experience, it taught me the value of my voice and experiences. I ran for General Land Commissioner! I didn't make it past primaries but it was still a big leap for me to make a speech to 300+ of my peers."*
(Sponsored by the American Legion Riders Post 179)



Addison Creager, member of the Nationalist party as evidenced by the purple button on her bag (left), is having fun with new friends she has made (right).

Michelle Schuessler, from Smithson Valley High School, described her experience *"Girls state taught me that my voice matters and that I should use it to help others. It also helped me build my confidence and create life-long relationships."*
(Sponsored by the Rotary Club of New Braunfels)



Michelle poses with some of the Citizens she met that helped build her confidence and became life-long friends. Silly time on the right.

Another Citizen remarked *“I met so many beautiful and accomplished young women that are going to be on my heart for a lifetime. I’ve learned my voice and built my confidence all thanks to the wonderful staff and sponsors that supported my journey. What an experience that has taught me endurance and strength. Thank you!”*

The following describes the daily activities of your Citizens during their week at Girls State



Sunday, June 14, 2026

Today, 628 young women from across Texas arrived to the mythical 51st state to kick off the 82nd session of Texas Bluebonnet Girls State held at Texas Lutheran University. Staffing the program was a team of over 100 dedicated volunteers, most of whom are members of the American Legion Auxiliary and former Girl State Citizens

After settling in to their cities, the new Citizens gathered in Jackson Auditorium where they were warmly welcomed by Girls State Director Lori Swann. (center below) She encouraged the young ladies to appreciate the experience ahead and to make the most of every opportunity. As a Girls State Citizen in 1980, she was elected Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, voted Outstanding Citizen and selected to attend Girls Nation in Washington, D.C. She graduated from Rice University and The University of Texas School of Law and is a member of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 449 in Arlington.



(Above) Citizens are welcomed by Girls State Director Lori Swann (center) in Jackson Auditorium. They also heard greetings from guest speakers and received information about the week’s activities.



(Left) **Alecia McCain, Vice President of Enrollment at Texas Lutheran University**, reminded the girls how special it is to be here as she stated *"You have been selected to be part of this week because someone saw the potential in you, but also because they know you can make a difference for others in the world."*

(Center) **Donna Dogden, Mayor of Seguin**, expressed to all Citizens that it's never too early to get involved. *"There's an increasing amount of women in politics because it's about community, it's about relationships, it's about care, and we make communities great!"*

(Right) **Leigh-Anne Stewart, President, American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Texas**, echoed this message. *"I hope you take back everything you learn to your classes, best friends, families, and put it back into your communities. Remember that you are a mentor and a role model to so many."*



(Left to right) Other administrators with Girls State include Co-Director Connie Bridges, Co-Director Karen Rodriguez and Associate Director of Administration Ann Doan who are members of the American Legion Auxiliary and former Girls State Citizens.



(Left) American Legion Auxiliary Department (State) Vice President Candy Zavala poses with TLU's Bulldog Lucky. (Right) Volunteers manning the Girls State Store are Auxiliary Vice President Candy Zavala, Auxiliary member Michelle Muth and Auxiliary Department (State) President Leah Ann Stewart.

Monday, June 15, 2026

To kick off the first full day, Speaker of the House Claire Noel and Senate President Taylor Wright announced the new legislative Floor leaders: Anvika Jain (National, City C) and Simone Tze Huse (Federal, City I) for the House, and Claire Weng (National, City C) and Sania Abraham (Federal, City E) for the Senate.

Citizens spent the day learning about local government before forming their city and holding elections to establish their city and county leadership. Former Girls State Governor Chloe Luo urged delegates to embrace the experience, saying, *"Somewhere in the world, there is a girl who would give anything to have the opportunities sitting in front of you today, and the best way to honor that privilege is to use it."*



Luo further reminded citizens that having a voice is a privilege, urging them to make the most of this wonderful opportunity: *"I thought Girls State was going to teach me how government works. But the most important lesson I learned had nothing to do with government. It was learning what a privilege it is to have a voice."* And *"Somewhere in the world, there is a girl who would give anything to have the opportunities sitting in front of you today. And the best way to honor that privilege is to use it."*



Tuesday, June 16, 2026

Citizens began Party Day with a flag-raising ceremony, filing for office, attending lively House and Senate sessions, and building party platforms. National Party Sponsor Kristen Gordon and Federal Party Sponsor Sarah Lanford volunteers expressed excitement for Party Day, noting that it launches the platform-building process and gives delegates the opportunity to discuss key issues and take action.

During a Q&A panel, Every Texan Executive Director Parisa Fatehi-Weeks shared insights on working in male-dominated fields, encouraging citizens to treat setbacks as growth opportunities: *"Don't let those stumbles trip you up because the next thing you know you're the boss."* She also emphasized the power of individuality, adding, *"No one else has the voice that you have... How boring would it be if they were all the same?"*

The day concluded with state party candidate speeches and elections for precinct, county, and state positions pictured below.



Federal Party:

Party Chair – Emmy Vacek, City C

Vice Chair – Aditi Gunasekar, City A

House Whip – Maya Namandi, City A

Senate Whip – Nina Chen, City K



National Party:

Party Chair – Olivia Mann, City K

Vice Chair – Tatum Neal, City A

House Whip – Abby Beadle, City J

Senate Whip – Jasmine Nguyen, City F

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

The day began early gathering Citizens for the "Big Tex" photo, followed by city council meetings to craft local ordinances and campaigns for county and state offices.

Spirited discourse took place in the House and Senate where citizens submitted legislation, debated bills, and built confidence in parliamentary procedure.

Following the nightly flag lowering ceremony, counties heard primary election returns and held runoff elections. The evening concluded with Texas Girls State Director Lori Swann announcing each party's state candidates. Good luck to all.





Our own **Stephanie Padalecki in City F** ran for Agriculture Commissioner for the Federal Party. She was not elected but she gave it her all with a rousing campaign speech. She is pictured fourth from the right. Great job, Stephanie! We are so proud of you.

Thursday, June 18, 2026

Thursday began with bill submissions and House and Senate legislative debates, followed by speeches from Federal and National party office nominees for state positions. Eloquent speeches were made with confidence and zeal. During the afternoon Whistle Stop, Candidates for Attorney General, Lieutenant Governor, and Governor gave campaign speeches and fielded questions prior to voting. Following the City Song Showdown, Girls State Director Lori Swan ended the night by announcing newly elected state officials who are pictured below. Congratulations to everyone!



Governor: Kylee Griffin, City F
 Lieutenant Governor: Bailey Sanders, City E
 Attorney General: Yewon Jo, City E
 Chief Justice of the Supreme Court: Aarti Srinivasan, City C
 Commissioner of Agriculture: Pepper Mayfield, City L
 Commissioner of the General Land Office: Mia Sebastian, City A
 Comptroller of Public Accounts: Rachael Oguneke, City A
 Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals: Jenna Johnson, City H
 Railroad Commissioner: Tanya Kuriakose, City G



Friday, June 19, 2026

The House and Senate convened for the last time of the 82nd session to debate topics ranging from changing minimum wage to AI guardrails. Newly-elected state officials were also inaugurated. The Honorable Stephanie Bascon, Judge - 466th Judicial District Court, administered the oaths of office and swore in the 2026 Texas Bluebonnet Girls State elected officials. Her address highlighted patriotism along with the crucial impact of female leadership in public office.

Alumna Mayor Gina Ortiz-Jones delivered an inspiring address to delegates encouraging them: *“This program has shaped strong female leaders and now you are all a part of that.”* This was followed by the adjournment of the final legislative session by Speaker of the House Claire Noel and Senate President Taylor Wright.

Afternoon activities included a digital literacy workshop, Juneteenth walk and college and career fair ending with an evening talent show in Jackson Auditorium. Citizens then returned to their cities for their final night where their counselors hosted special celebrations to honor the dedication and achievements of their City Citizens.

Saturday, June 20, 2026

The 82nd session of Texas Bluebonnet Girls State proved to be a transformative, unforgettable, empowering, inspiring, defining, and impactful week for the 600 + citizens who attended. At the closing ceremony their newly-elected Governor Kylee Griffin addressed them by warmly stating *“Girls State has given me the opportunity to impact the people around me... I realized what I was fighting for and who I was fighting for: all of you!”*



Girls State Director Lori Swann addressed Citizens one last time as she enthusiastically announced delegates and alternates who will represent Texas at [Girls Nation in July 2026](https://www.girls-state.org/bluebonnetblog). Selected were Anvika Jain of City C and Vanessa Valle of City D with alternates City E Citizen Charlotte Williams and City G Citizen Gargi. Swann shared how incredibly proud she was of each and every Citizen as **she commended them for their extraordinary dedication, efforts and achievements throughout the session. Whether they ran for office, drafted and debated legislation, or supported fellow delegates in their campaigns, their dedication, commitment, determination, and perseverance made an indelible mark on the 51st State of Texas Bluebonnet Girls State.** She concluded by encouraging Citizens to make a difference wherever they go by using the tools they have acquired and the friendships they have formed. Congratulation, Citizens!

To learn more about Girls State visit <https://www.girls-state.org/> or read the Bluebonnet Blog at <https://www.girls-state.org/bluebonnetblog>.

**Thank you for the opportunity to show you how your donation
has impacted the Girls State Citizens you have sponsored.
We look forward to partnering with you on our
2027 Girls State Program.**

**Respectfully submitted by,
Sandi Schendel, Girls State Chairman
Walton F. Hoffmann Memorial Unit 179
American Legion Auxiliary
New Braunfels, Texas**