



NOTABLE WELCOME ★ DELEGATES GATHER TO HEAR THE FASCINATING STORY OF CONA'S BEGINNING.

PHOTO BY ANNA OLSON, OK

50 YEARS: AN IDEA CREATES A GROWING LEGACY

JACKSON ALDRIDGE, VA, AND ASHLEY HATCH, CO ★ STAFF WRITERS

It all began with an idea. To commence the 50th CONA conference, a special speaker, Michal Hart Hillman, welcomed the delegates at the opening ceremony.

Hilman is responsible for originating the idea of a National Youth and Government conference. In her speech, Hillman told the story of how the Conference came to be.

Originating with an idea which she brought to her Youth and Government state conference in Alabama, CONA grew from Hillman's suggestion of creating a national Youth and Government conference. Her plan was met with support from prominent leaders of the YMCA and her dream became a reality in 1968 when the first CONA took place in Stone Mountain, Georgia.

At the first conference there were only 25 proposals, one of which held great significance --

Hillman brought a proposal to establish a National Youth Conference on National Affairs, reoccurring each year.

CONA was founded on the principles of youth development, social responsibility, honesty, and respect, and while the conference has grown, the principles remain a significant part of what CONA is today.

The story of how CONA began highlights how important an idea can be once it begins to unfold. Hillman encourages delegates to share, to give their passion, and to build community by harnessing the power of all -- all people, all delegates, all ideas. She believes that leaders follow both their hearts and their heads and they build their power by building together and not taking power over one another.

Hillman hopes that the "delegates will continue to be active citizens in society -- wherever they live and work. Our country and our world deserves informed citizens and dedicated public servants." ★



COMMITMENT ★ CONA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SAM ADAMS ENCOURAGES DELEGATES TO COMMIT TO OTHERS.

PHOTO BY ABBIE SKLADAN, NC

COMMITMENTS AND EUREKAS OPEN THE 50TH NATIONAL AFFAIRS

ASHLEY HATCH, CO ★ STAFF WRITER

Smiling faces filled with Blue Ridge Spirit greeted new and returning delegates as they anxiously awaited the opening ceremony of the 50th YMCA Conference on National Affairs.

CONA Executive Director Sam Adams spoke to delegates about commitment. His speech was about different reasons delegates may be here and the different commitments they may want to make. He left us with a simple message: "I hope you can find something to commit to, something positive, something lasting and something that will benefit others."

Melissa Logan, chief executive officer and president of the Blue Ridge Assembly, spoke about the history of the assembly. She talked about Dr. Willis D. Weatherford Sr., who "wanted to find a place where young people could get away." Finding Blue Ridge was a great victory for him and because of him, we are able to make countless memories on the Eureka Hall steps. As you venture through the week, make sure to make commitments to yourself, and to also have many joyous "Eureka!" moments. ★

PRESIDING OFFICERS OF THE DAY

ANDIE FLANIGAN

**TOMMY DANNENFELSER, VA,
AND ERIN HENRY, NY** ★
STAFF WRITERS

Andie Flanigan attended CONA twice before being chosen to serve as a presiding officer for the 50th conference. She began Youth and Government as a sophomore in high school, originally attending meetings to support a family member. After her first experiences, Flanigan was inspired to enter the world of Youth and Government. Flanigan attended her first state conference in her home state of Louisiana and received the Monice Oliphant Award for her representation of the first Y core value: respect. The following year, Flanigan was elected to the position of lieutenant governor and won the premium delegate award.

Currently, Flanigan is a computer science major at Louisiana State University and she plans to use the skills she acquires in college to study election data, specifically polling and campaign statistics.

Flanigan attributes her current success to her experience in YAG, meanwhile her passion for the conference is an inspiration to all the delegates. ★



JOHN BALL

ASHLEY HATCH, CO ★
STAFF WRITER

John Ball, a rising Harvard University sophomore, grew up in central Ohio near Columbus, where he was heavily involved in Y swimming programs. Through his school, Ball became an active member in Youth and Government, but he had no idea YAG and the YMCA were connected. Ball soon realized both programs embrace the YMCA's mission for education and healthy living.

When meeting new CONA delegates, Ball tells the story of how he combined proposals with Chantel Williams, who would go on to be a 2015 PO. After combining, Ball was quite nervous, questioning if he should even talk. Ball shares his first CONA experience to show how it helped him find new strengths and provided him with a friendship. This week on the Mountain, Ball wants to experience the Blue Ridge Spirit by interacting with the delegates and learning about their passions.

Ball hopes to become a professional writer or possibly go to law school, but he would really like to work for a nonprofit. He encourages others to do what they are passionate about. ★

SUNDAY WORSHIP OFFERS SPIRITUAL OUTLET



FAITH ★ OLIVIA WESTFALL LEADS DEVOTION (LEFT); DELEGATES JOIN IN SINGING AT THE SUNDAY WORSHIP

PHOTOS BY ABBIE SKLADAN, NC

CAROLINE BELL, NC ★ STAFF WRITER

For those who chose to participate, the first full day on the Mountain began with an optional worship service

The opening prayer, led by Addison Smith, Alabama, was followed by the song, "Ever Be," to remind everyone that God has taken care of us and will continue to do so. Noelle Michell, New York; JeanMarie Kmetz, Texas; as well as Olivia Pride and

Hayden Sledge of Alabama, sang "Ever Be" and another song later in the worship. Tennessee's Meg Perry read Galatians 6:1-10, which urges delegates to "be kind to everyone you meet, regardless of background."

Shortly after the reading, Elizabeth Gilbert, New York, read a quote by Martin Luther King Jr., discussing how to use nonviolence for peace, and Andrew Czazsty of Mississippi read the poem

"Precious, Present," urging delegates to enjoy the little moments.

Alabama's Olivia Westfall, led the morning devotion on tolerance. She read a few quotes from the Bible, the Quran and Mahatma Ghandi.

"This program teaches us to be world changers ... To make change, we must love thy neighbors. It is our differences that make us unique, and it is our differences that bring us

together," Westfall said.

A concluding song, "Holy Spirit," spoke of the omnipresence of God. Before closing prayer and dismissal, the floor was opened for delegates to share what was on their hearts.

Optional morning devotions in the Blue Ridge Center lobby offer a spiritual outlet for the remainder of the week, which are led by former CONA Director Bob McGaughey. ★

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