

SANTA GERTRUDIS JUNIORS 'SWING FOR THE FENCES'



National Junior Santa Gertrudis Association members at the 2023 GOALS. Forty members representing six states participated in this year's event.

BY CHRISTY FUCHS MORAN, GOALS 2023 CO-CHAIR

Forty members of the National Junior Santa Gertrudis Association (NJSJA) represented the Santa Gertrudis breed at the 2023 Gerts Ongoing Advanced Leadership Summit (GOALS) in Louisville, Ky., July 25-29, 2023. These youth and five adult chaperones gathered in Falls of Rough, Ky., at the Rough River Dam State Park to share in five days of leadership development, team-building fun, Kentucky tourism and agriculture-related experiences.

The GOALS 2023 theme was "Swing for the Fences," a common thread experienced throughout as the youth continued to develop their teamwork skills in leadership classes, participated in a super competitive tournament of wiffle ball and then visited the Louisville Slugger Factory and Museum. These youth gave it their all in "swinging for the fences" to make this the best GOALS yet!

Young leaders representing six states (Texas, Mississippi, Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas and New Mexico) participated in the event that led them on new adventures, allowed them to gain valuable leadership skills and interact with many wonderful Santa Gertrudis friends for a memory-making event. This by far was the youngest group of GOALS attendees, some of whom had never flown



or been away on their own, so what a wonderful experience to grow and learn about being on their own in life-changing experiences. Also, there were youth on this trip who may not have been able to show a Gert heifer all year because of circumstances but, because of their positive knowledge of GOALS, they wanted to be on this trip and also brought a new member, which ended up being a life-changing event for them, too. THIS is what GOALS is about!

Our time at the lodge in beautiful northeastern Kentucky began with an evening of ice breakers and introductions so everyone could get to know each other

through fun and interactive games. We introduced the task of writing Happy Grams, which ended up being a hit of the week. Juniors wrote notes throughout the week that shared inspirational notes of kindness, respect, compliments and encouragement for fellow friends and new friends made at GOALS. These notes were placed anonymously in envelopes for them to take home at the end of the week. I think this exercise was a powerful tool for our juniors to learn to express themselves and also share kind things to make others feel better about themselves, too.

Our first full day at GOALS kicked off with leadership development led by Rhett Laubach, Our Next Speaker. Laubach, a seasoned GOALS guest, led multiple educational and inspirational



Rhett Laubach, Our Next Speaker, poses for a photo with GOALS participants. Laubach led multiple educational sessions.

sessions to encourage participants to learn more about themselves and those around them, explore their self-worth and how to be better leaders and citizens.

Outside the classroom, juniors experienced active bonding and team-building activities through an intense tournament of wiffle ball, as well as recreational activities, including swimming at the pool, putt-putt golf and tennis. Everyone enjoyed the annual GOALS Beef Cook-Off. Team members won cooking ingredients like bread, cheese, condiments and vegetables to create their own “epic gourmet beef burger” in a “Chopped-like” challenge. Teams of four randomly paired members loved this stiff competition as they grilled their meat patties, created their special entree and came up with their presentation for judges. Once again, these youth showed their true grit and competitive spirit in “being the best” in all they do

through this competition as they do in most things they do.

A full day was spent in Louisville to take on Kentucky tourism. At Churchill Downs we went to the “backside” of the track for a special treat – a tour of the Churchill Downs stables and training center. Young thoroughbred horses are brought in from all over the world to experience the life at the racetrack and stables to become acclimated. Our group enjoyed breakfast at Wagner’s Track Kitchen beside the track where we watched the horses work out and race. We were also able to stand inside the starting gates of the Kentucky Derby before we toured the grandstands, learned about



National Junior Santa Gertrudis Association officers.

the facility’s history, stood next to the track and visited the amazing Kentucky Derby Museum.

Next was the Louisville Slugger Factory and Museum where we ate lunch in the factory loft and took a close-up tour of the bat factory to witness custom professional bats as well as retail wooden bats being made from a piece of crude timber wood into to a beautiful, expensive, iconic Louisville Slugger. Our kids got to tour the museum, try out bats from professional players, hit balls in the batting cages and even customize bats to order and personalize for themselves.

These two stops on our Louisville tour day provided a look into agricultural arenas different than the beef cattle industry that we are used to. Learning about the equine and horseracing industries as well as the timber industry were fun agricultural tourist attractions for our young people.

We traveled another day for a full experience in Shepherdsville at Cedar Creek Farms, a Santa Gertrudis ranch owned and operated by Santa Gertrudis Breeders International member and District 5 Director Jewett Borden who raises Gert cattle in a farm-to-finishing operation with meat market. It was very neat to see a breeder in our breed fully involved and thriving in his work and livelihood. This field day also shared a variety of educational rotations ranging from farm equipment safety to beef grading, genetics and feeding programs to achieve higher quality cuts of beef to veterinary care and breeding. Youth also heard from representatives from



GOALS group at the park.



GOALS youth participants, chaperones and field day hosts at Cedar Creek Farms. SGBI member and District 5 Director Jewett Borden provided a field day experience at his farm-to-finishing operation in Shepherdsville.



LEFT: National Junior Santa Gertrudis Association Board at GOALS. **RIGHT:** Goals participants with "Mr. Agriculture" in Kentucky. Mr. Warren Beeler gave an amazing motivational and informative talk to the juniors.

the Raising Hope Farmer Wellness program, Farm Bureau and the Department of Agriculture, who are all working together for the good of Kentucky agriculture. We then enjoyed a dinner made with Cedar Creek meat at the Jim Beam Distillery Kitchen Table Restaurant to close a great GOALS trip.

Our juniors enjoyed the traditional junior GOALS dance one evening but also loved just hanging out together to visit and get to know each other better. All these events provided opportunities where we saw the young people moving around and hanging out with new people each time, which was such a joy to see. These kids really used this trip for positive self-development for themselves and others, and this was shared by attendees and parents with mentors and chaperones, as well as verbally in a reflections session at the end of GOALS. The NJSGA Board of 15 youth also met to plan the new year. We also spent time talking about how this trip was made possible and sharing our thanks through a thank you note-writing session to understand the importance of sharing gratitude with others.

The attendees enjoyed prayers and meals together and lodging at the beautiful park. Experiences for many of these youth were life lessons, including being away from home, staying with new roommates, getting out of comfort zones and, hopefully, leaving as a more-developed, confident youth. All of this was made possible because of their one common bond – membership in the National Junior Santa Gertrudis Association.

Thank you to the many sponsors and donors who helped make GOALS 2023



The GOALS group stands near the starting gates of the Kentucky Derby. The members also toured the Churchill Downs stables and training center and Kentucky Derby Museum.



Juniors at the Kentucky Derby Museum and Church Hill Downs.

possible through financial donations, silent auction donations and purchases, and those who gave of their time and talents to make this trip possible. Thank you to all for your support of this program and all junior endeavors now and in the future! It was a special joy to spend this week with our team

that coordinated and chaperoned this trip – Casey Jones, David Jones, Heather Strait and Vice President of Youth Activities Trai Stegall. As a GOALS coordinator and chaperone, I could not be prouder of our juniors and this program, and what it does for them and the promise for our breed and future!