

AUGUST 2012

WATT'S UP

AT LA PLATA ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

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Board of Directors:

Jerry McCaw, President - District 2
Tom Compton, Vice President - District 2
Joe Wheeling, Treasurer - District 4
Britt Bassett - District 3
Jeff Berman - District 3
Heather Erb - District 4
Bob Formwalt - District 1
Ken Fox - District 1
Harry Goff - District 3
Davin Montoya - District 2
Lindon "Lin" Stewart - District 1

Chief Executive Officer:

Greg W. Munro

Next Board Meeting:

9 a.m. | Wednesday, August 22, 2012
LPEA Headquarters, Durango

Mission Statement:

La Plata Electric Association provides its members safe, reliable electricity at the lowest reasonable cost while being environmentally responsible.

Save Your Energy
LPEA
La Plata Electric Association, Inc.
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

"A great ride"

BY PAM PATTON, FORMER MEMBER, LPEA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

As John and I pack our bags for a new life chapter that requires we spend 90 percent of our time in Denver, I find myself stopping to reflect. Since first joining the LPEA board in February 2000, I've been privileged to serve with 23 fellow directors! We've had three CEOs and three CFOs during my tenure, with CEO Greg Munro taking the helm in 2004.

Under Greg's leadership, the company has tightened its belt. Back in 2000, LPEA operated with 117 employees and about 60 percent of operating costs went to purchase of wholesale power. Today, a lean, efficient team of 104 operates a much larger system and the wholesale power bill is now 71 percent of expenses.

The LPEA board provides vision and financial oversight. On the vision side, the mission is now quite clear – to provide our members safe, reliable electricity at the lowest reasonable cost while being environmentally responsible. On the financial side, I found myself initially overwhelmed. After struggling, I went back to college for some accounting classes! I'm proud to report that the company is on very sound financial footing, operating with a lean margin to keep your rates as low as possible. FastTrack Communications, jointly-owned by LPEA and Empire Electric, is profitable and providing vital fiber optic-based broadband services across the region.

Back in 2000, LPEA was already exploring renewable energy sources. (The company even tested an experimental hydrogen fuel cell.) It began offering voluntary green power at \$2.50 per 100 kWh block. Green power is now 8 cents per block! Back in 2000, LPEA hadn't begun acknowledging CFLs. Now, members receive rebates for purchasing far more efficient LED bulbs.

Numerous competent and competitive local solar energy companies are now in LPEA's service territory and more than 300 members have installed solar arrays. Many watch the meter spin backwards on sunny days with the LPEA distribution grid acting as the battery at night. On the horizon is bio-mass electricity generation and larger scale solar projects.

It is the safe, reliable part of the LPEA mission that makes me most proud. During the 2002 Missionary Ridge and Valley fires, LPEA's crews, joined by our line construction subsidiary WESODI, worked around the clock rebuilding burned lines and restoring power, even as the fires raged.

The winter of 2008 brought the single most damaging storm in LPEA's history, snapping poles and crossbars and taking down lines across the system. LPEA and WESODI crews "post holed" through snow drifts and worked nonstop until every light was back on.

I would like to thank Greg Munro, his entire staff, my fellow board members and all of you. It has been an honor to work with and serve you. John and I plan to see you at the LPEA annual meeting next May!

Learn more about Patton's new position with the Colorado Public Utilities Commission on page 3 of this newsletter. ⚙



CO-OP MEMBERS

Ask...

Q: I just read on the internet that if the electric grid goes down, that my net-metered (grid-tied) solar PV system will shut down too, and even if the sun is shining, I won't have electricity. Is that true?

A: It's almost always true. All grid-tied solar equipment sold today includes the safety feature of automatically shutting off when there's a power outage affecting your neighborhood.

If a solar PV system is tied (net-metered) to LPEA's system (the grid), the PV customer is essentially using LPEA as a back-up battery, feeding whatever excess power is generated from the sun back on to the system (and spinning the meter backwards). If LPEA has an outage, the PV transmission will automatically be disabled to stop that feed of electricity back up the wires where LPEA linemen are working to restore power. A solar system feeding power back up a line that is assumed to be out of power could literally result in injury or death to an LPEA lineman. ⚙️

LPEA Offices
will be closed
Monday, Sept. 3
in observance of
Labor Day

A new Ponderosa

The Ponderosa is almost complete. No, it's not a ranch or a tree farm, rather an important facility that will help provide the residents of Archuleta County with more safe, reliable power long into the future.

LPEA's new Ponderosa Substation, located to the west of the town of Pagosa Springs off Highway 160, will soon be energized, doubling the flow of electricity into Pagosa (from 7 MVA (mega volt ampere) to 14 MVA). The project was needed to serve the area's growth as well as increase redundancy to an additional 2,720 LPEA members in Archuleta County.

"Our existing, older substation is located on the opposite side of the highway, across from the entrance to Parelli Natural Horsemanship," says Ron Meier, manager of engineering. "We went to the county with our plans to expand the existing substation and that opened a door, resulting in a partnership that has been unique in LPEA's history of building substations."

The view corridor was the main issue. The old, smaller substation marred the scenic view of the mountains for drivers arriving from the west, and a larger one would have had greater impact. Plus the substation was in clear view for Parelli's patrons on the hill.

"So we came up with what hopefully would be a solution," said Mark Weiler, Parelli CEO. "We offered land on the ranch, out of the view corridor, plus a perpetual easement for the property."

"The alternate site has turned out to be superior to the original location," said Jake Wills, LPEA project engineer. "It is easier and safer to access off the highway and it allows for more room, which will increase safety for maintenance and snow removal."

The Parelli site is also generally less visible from the highway, and LPEA is taking extra steps to further mitigate its visual presence.

To ensure that all details were agreed upon, legal and by-the-book, the process to complete the new Ponderosa took time, delaying the project by about a year. The delay and new site didn't, however, force LPEA to exceed its \$3 million budget. LPEA had been planning for the expansion and budgeted accordingly, meaning the new construction has and will not impact members' rates.

"We always strive to solve issues for the benefit of the greater good, and we were very pleased to be able to work with Parelli to secure this alternate site," says Meier. "It has turned out to be a win-win for LPEA and its membership, as well as the Parelli organization and Pagosa's visitors."

LPEA retains ownership of the old substation land. Once the new Ponderosa Substation is fully operational, the old equipment, with the exception of the power lines, will be taken down and the land reclaimed. ⚙️



The new Ponderosa Substation in Archuleta County is soon to be energized. Photo: Jake Wills

Golf for good!

LPEA once again hosted its annual Golf Tournament at the Pagosa Springs Golf Course, Saturday, June 23, 2012, raising \$5,150 for the Pagosa Springs Nurturing Center and \$1,150 for the Darin Rome Memorial Music Scholarship Fund.

“We really want to thank all of the sponsors and underwriters who contribute to the LPEA Golf Tournament,” says Mike Alley, district supervisor and event organizer. “We would not otherwise be able to contribute so much to the charities in our community.”

Organized by LPEA’s line personnel, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (Local IBEW 111 26A) based in the Pagosa Springs office, the LPEA Golf Tournament will be held again next June 2013, and benefit the Darin Rome Memorial Music Scholarship Fund.

“Our goal for next year is to raise \$8,000,” says Laura Rome, LPEA executive assistant to CEO Greg Munro and widow of Darin Rome. “And we’re hoping to add live music to the event with Tim Sullivan and other friends who Darin used to play with. It will be a very special event.”

For further information regarding the LPEA Golf Tournament, contact Mike Alley at 970.382.7721 or 970.749.0260, or malley@lpea.coop. ☀



Brent Tanner (L) and Mike Alley (R) of LPEA, present cash proceeds from the LPEA Golf Tournament to Mona Gonzalez and Laurie Gutierrez of the Pagosa Springs Nurturing Center, and Laura Rome representing the Darin Rome Memorial Music Scholarship, respectively.

Photo: Liz Alley

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION?

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) is part of Colorado state government and is located within the Department of Regulatory Agencies. It was created in 1913 with the passage of the Public Utilities Act and has the task of regulating and overseeing public utilities in Colorado.

The PUC strives to serve the public interest by effectively regulating utilities and facilities so that the people of Colorado receive safe, reliable and reasonably-priced services consistent with the economic, environmental and social values of our state. It has economic and quality of service regulatory authority over intrastate telecommunications services, and investor-owned electric, gas and water utilities. The PUC also regulates utilities that move, such as railroad and motor carrier utilities that are for hire.

The PUC’s three Commissioners are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Colorado Senate. By law, Commissioners serve four-year, staggered terms and no more than two appointees may be from the same political party. A Director manages the staff and daily operations of the PUC, which includes about 90 staff members. ☀

New Director to be appointed... Patton leaves board

With Director Pam Patton’s appointment to the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC), LPEA has begun the process to find a replacement to fill her seat on the LPEA Board of Directors. Patton officially stepped down from the LPEA board on June 20, 2012 to prepare for her work at the PUC.

Pursuant to the LPEA Bylaws, Article III, Section 7, a vacancy shall be filled by an affirmative vote of a majority of the remaining directors and that any director so appointed serves for the remainder of the term of his predecessor. Patton’s current term expires in May 2013.

Any member of La Plata Electric Association who is a permanent resident of District 4 (North and East La Plata County) can apply for the vacant seat. Applications were to be submitted by July 16, 2012.

“We will review the applications and interview the candidates, then select the best person to fill the seat,” says Jerry McCaw, LPEA board president. “Pam’s shoes are going to be big ones to fill and we can only hope to find someone as competent, caring and conscientious as Pam is. She has served all the members of LPEA extremely well and now she will take her expertise to the state level.”

Hope is to have Patton’s seat filled by the August 22 LPEA board meeting. ☀

FUNDING ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Region 9 Economic Development District of Southwest Colorado is now offering low-interest business loans specifically for energy efficient upgrades.

LPEA is actively working with businesses to advise them on saving their energy and dollars, and providing some rebates after installation of efficient lighting and more. Unfortunately, the upfront costs for retrofits might be prohibitive for businesses, and this is where Region 9 comes in.

Region 9 has established a special Revolving Loan Fund that can cover the cost for any type of energy efficient upgrades, ranging from insulation and new windows, to simple energy efficient lighting retrofits. Businesses can secure a loan to pay for these efforts, and the energy savings realized each month could go far to, or even completely cover, the loan payments.

"We're very excited that this might help with commercial lighting retrofits," says Mark Schwantes, manager of corporate services. "We've done enough lighting retrofits that we can see the actual energy and dollar savings. Utilizing Region 9 could be a win-win for businesses."

For information, contact Jenny Stollar, Region 9 business loan officer, 970.247.9621 or jenny@scan.org. Or learn more about Region 9's programs at www.scan.org.

Youth on Tour



Area high school students Dante Ciotti (Durango), Angela Gallegos (Pagosa Springs) and Katherine Svanes (Bayfield) represented LPEA as part of the National Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington D.C., held June 14-21, 2012. The opportunity to participate in the D.C. Youth Tour was open to all current high school juniors who receive their electric power from LPEA, and the cooperative annually underwrites the cost of the trip for up to four students within its service territory. Pictured with their fellow Colorado rural electric co-op representatives and Senator Michael Bennet (D-Colorado) (center), are Svanes (seated far left), Chiotti (seated, third from left), and Gallegos (seated far right).

So long to Sharily

After 20 years of service to LPEA, 15 as a Dispatcher, Sharily Miller-Ferris has stepped into the next phase in her life: being a housewife.

"People tell me I'm going to get really bored, but I'm looking forward to doing all the things I never got to do because I worked outside the home since I was 14," says Miller-Ferris, who also raises and shows Champion Akitas. "I'm going to learn to cook, and I've got a year's worth of 'honey-dos.'"

Miller came to LPEA from Greeley Gas where she had done data entry and billing collections. During her first five years at LPEA she served as a meter reader, in the warehouse and in billing/collections. Her varied positions served her well when she entered the two-year, on-the-job LPEA Dispatch Apprentice program.

"It's a great program," she says, noting that Dispatch is the hub of LPEA operations. "As an apprentice you learn all aspects of the electrical industry. You understand how it all pieces together – the big picture. It was a really good education... I loved my job."

LPEA is currently seeking a new apprentice to fill Miller-Ferris' position.

"If you have children, tell them that this electrical industry offers great opportunity. It's good to get them started as young adults," she says. "But you definitely need commitment. It's a career, not just a job."



Sharily Miller-Ferris plans to spend more time with her Champion Akitas, and is pictured here with "Deacon" at his Best Bred by Exhibitor in Show win over 186 dogs of all breeds at the Rio Grande Kennel Club in Albuquerque. Proud papa, Randy Ferris, LPEA land rights administrator, looks on.