

WATT'S UP

AT LA PLATA ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

NOVEMBER 2014

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Board of Directors:

Michael Rendon, President – [District 3]
Heather Erb, Vice President – [District 4]
Mark Garcia, Treasurer – [District 1]
Jeff Berman, Secretary – [District 3]
Britt Bassett [District 3]
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Bob Formwalt [District 1]
Bob Lynch [District 1]
Jerry McCaw [District 2]
Davin Montoya [District 2]
Jack Turner [District 4]
Joe Wheeling [District 4]

Mission Statement:

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

Statement of Non-discrimination

LPEA is an equal opportunity provider and employer M/F/Disability/Veteran.

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.



The industry is changing

BY JEFF BERMAN | CREA REPRESENTATIVE | JBERMAN@LPEA.COOP

As La Plata Electric's representative to the statewide trade organization, the Colorado Rural Electric Association (CREA), I am watching as advanced technology and environmental issues force change upon the electric industry state and nationwide. LPEA is no exception; in the last three years we have seen more hotly contested board member elections in part over these very issues.

Renewable energy is becoming increasingly competitive with distant central generating stations burning fossil fuels, mostly burning coal. This is why Xcel Energy, Colorado's largest electric utility serving mainly the Front Range, is now planning even more renewable energy than required by law.

Cell phones brought down the landline, Netflix brought down Blockbuster, and now the demand for, and economics of, cleaner energy are straining our historical financial model: Sign long-term contracts with Tri-State Generation & Transmission to purchase electricity from those far-off power plants. Rather than a threat though, these developments present an opportunity to not only reduce our reliance on fossil fuel based electricity, but to cost-effectively expand renewable energy and promote local economic development.

Based on my vantage point at CREA, both LPEA and its members are leaders in the expansion of cleaner energy. We have one of the highest concentrations of solar systems in Colorado, and one of the strongest energy efficiency programs helping businesses reduce their electric usage for lighting, and hence their bill. We are installing advanced meters that make possible voluntary demand-response programs that can better couple intermittent renewable energy with members' usage, thereby lowering costs to the cooperative as a whole. And we have challenged how Tri-State charges us in part because they were undercutting some of these efforts.

We need to do more, but plan to tackle these challenges all the while minimizing impacts on, or even benefitting, our members' bottom line. When I ask LPEA members if they care about low rates, well of course everyone says yes. But when queried about what that rate actually is, few know. What we all know and really care about is our electric *bill*. So as a utility we are refocusing our historic attention away from just rates, to helping keep your bills down. If we expand our business lighting retrofit and other efficiency programs ten times over for instance, and members' usage comes down by more than the cost of the programs, then our bills can go down. And isn't that the bottom line?

By advancing a comprehensive 21st century response, LPEA will remain a leader in tackling these challenges. That means expanding our efforts to help every member become more efficient in their electricity use, working with our members to better respond to fluctuations in energy supply and demand through enhanced technology and voluntary rates (think time-of-use rate on steroids), and advancing cost-effective renewable energy options ... while remaining focused on our members' real bottom line. ⚡



LIVE WIRES

E Nov. Board of Directors Meeting

The next meeting of the LPEA Board of Directors is set for Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2014, 9 a.m. at LPEA headquarters in Durango. The agenda will be posted 10 days in advance of the meeting at www.lpea.coop. All members are reminded that public comment is heard at the beginning of the meeting.

E Electric Service Regulations to be published

Periodically the LPEA Board reviews the Electric Service Regulations, which set forth the terms and conditions of the Rate Schedules, and under which electric distribution service is supplied to LPEA's members. Revisions to the regulations are slated to be publicly noticed in the *Durango Herald*, *Pine River Times* and *Pagosa Springs Sun* following preliminary adoption at the Nov. 19 Board of Directors meeting.

E Daylight Saving Time ends

Time to "Fall Back" as Daylight Saving Time ends on Sunday, Nov. 2. Be sure to set your clocks back one hour when you head to bed Saturday night.

E Happy Thanksgiving!

LPEA offices in Durango and Pagosa Springs will be closed, Thursday and Friday, Nov. 27-28, in observation of Thanksgiving.

Remember the winter "blinks"

When winter storms begin to roll through southwest Colorado, they're sometimes accompanied by irritating "blinks" as the electricity appears to turn off and on in rapid succession, signaling to some LPEA members that perhaps something is wrong with their lines.

"Though it could possibly be something more, likely your lights are flickering because LPEA's system is doing just what it's designed to do," says Justin Talbot, manager of operations. "The power cutting off and on can be a nuisance, but it's all about safety."

LPEA's electricity distribution system is programmed such that when any foreign object – such as a tree branch, another wire, etc. – comes in contact with the energized wires, the system automatically locks open (or stops the flow of electricity) until the problem can be determined. During storms, wind can blow wires together or cause tree branches to briefly touch a line. Also, sometimes wet snow will pile up on the wires, and then discharge – or abruptly fall off – causing the wires to bounce and interact with each other or nearby objects. Any of these occurrences will prompt the system to automatically cut power to avoid potential fires or further damage to the system, as well as give the interfering object a chance to clear the line.

"The 'blinks' happen because LPEA's automated distribution system will quickly try to re-energize the line, recognizing that the interference may be only temporary," says Talbot. "If, however, the system senses a continued problem, an extended outage is projected. At that time, our Dispatch directs LPEA's crews, which are on call 24-7, to the location to determine the cause of the outage and begin repairs."

If members experience a few blinks, it's not necessary to call LPEA immediately, according to Talbot. If, however, after about 15 minutes the power has not been automatically restored, members are encouraged to call the main LPEA line, 970.247.5786 to report the outage.

"When you call to report an outage, you will reach a customer service representative or our Outage Management System or OMS," says Brad Fuqua, engineering IT specialist. "If the OMS recognizes the phone number you're calling from, it can provide you with the latest outage information for your account, or if your call is reporting a new outage, it will automatically alert LPEA's Dispatch. As we welcome winter, be sure LPEA has your current phone numbers so that we can keep you informed during an outage."

"But back to the 'blinks,'" adds Talbot. "If you do experience continual, unusual brief outages, do let us know. It could be more than the snow bouncing the wires, and we'll get that repaired for you." ☀



LPEA presents at GBR

To help members better understand the new Community Solar Gardens currently being installed in LPEA's service territory, board members Heather Erb (pictured) and Britt Bassett addressed the monthly meeting of the Green Business Roundtable. Approximately 40 community members learned more about participating and how the "virtual net metering" would work with their LPEA electric bills. Learn more at www.lpea.coop.

Kiosk "card" available

LPEA's new drive-through kiosk in Durango is in operation, and as an added service to those who regularly use the kiosk, a new "quick ID" card is available.

"Our drive-through kiosk requires that members know their LPEA account number or carry their paper bill with them – who does that?" says Dennis Svanes, CFO. "If you use the kiosk regularly, getting a card will save you time."

Similar to the ID cards issued by banks, the card quickly logs LPEA members into their accounts. Then members can manage their accounts, including opting to pay their bills in a variety of ways.



Customer Service Representative Donna Arriza demonstrates the ease of the new drive-through kiosk.

To receive a new kiosk card, visit the lobby desk at LPEA's Durango office, 45 Stewart St., or give LPEA a call, 970.247.5786, and a card can be mailed.

Please note, while the kiosk does take cash, it cannot make change. Any excess cash deposited will be credited to the next month's bill. Also, at this time, the kiosk technology does not accommodate the old pre-pay LPEA account cards. Members must come to the front desk during regular business hours (Monday-Friday) to add dollars to their card. ⚡



The kiosk "card" (with a bar code on the back of the card displayed), instantly identifies members and brings information on to the monitor.

CO-OP MEMBERS

Ask...

Q: Why do I have to call LPEA before installing solar?

A: We understand your conundrum, and the truth is, if you want to install solar and not be connected to the "grid," you don't have to contact us. Most folks, however, want to be connected to LPEA's system to feed excess power generated back on to the grid, and also be able to access electricity when the sun isn't shining (using LPEA as the back-up battery).

Installing solar is great, and we're in support of your efforts. Unfortunately, the laws of physics trump most everything LPEA or our members would like to do. LPEA's system is not currently designed to receive an abundance of excess generation pushed back on the lines. One side effect could be that the electronics in your neighbors' homes could be damaged because of the surge of electricity.

To avoid over-loading the system, LPEA asks that you allow us to do an engineering review in advance. We'll then alert you, and your solar installer, about any potential challenges BEFORE you make a significant investment in a solar array. ⚡

Linemen to "fill the bucket"

Responding to community needs in advance of the holidays, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (Local IBEW 111 26A), of La Plata Electric Association (LPEA), will host its annual "Fill the Bucket" food drive, Saturday, Nov. 15, 2014.

LPEA's "bucket truck," and additional vehicles, will be parked at City Market in Pagosa Springs, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. to collect non-perishable food items (canned goods or boxed/bagged dry goods). Donated food will be distributed to community food banks in Archuleta County.

"Every year the need seems to be greater," says Mike Alley, LPEA district supervisor in Pagosa Springs, who is assisting in coordinating the event. "Food costs keep going up, so we want to help people stock their pantries for this coming winter."

Cash donations for the food banks are also welcomed, and donors can make arrangements to give directly by calling Alley at 970.749.0260, or bring a donation by the LPEA office in Pagosa Springs (603 S. 8th St.). Checks can be made payable to the IBEW Local 111 Brotherhood Fund. All donated funds will be distributed to the food banks.

"We're very proud that LPEA's IBEW members are once again volunteering their time for this important effort," says Mike Dreyspring, LPEA CEO. "We hope many folks will bring their food or cash donations to help support their neighbors and those less fortunate in our area."

For further information regarding the "Fill the Bucket" food drive, contact Mike Alley, 970.382.7721 or 970.749.0260, or malley@lpea.coop. ⚡



CAPITAL CREDITS REFUNDS NOW ON LPEA BILLS

LPEA members who have paid their electric bills to La Plata Electric Association (LPEA) since at least 2012, will receive capital credits refunds totaling \$4.5 million during the November billing cycle.

The LPEA Board of Directors, at the October board meeting, approved the refund, with the majority of the capital credits (also known as patronage capital) to be credited to member electricity bills, though any refund amounts larger than \$100 will be mailed as checks.

Traditionally LPEA has retired capital credits during the summer, but the LPEA board determined that receiving the distribution just before the holidays would be more welcomed.

"Capital credits represent our member's investment in La Plata Electric Association," says Mike Dreyspring, CEO, noting that LPEA is a not-for-profit corporation with a 501 (c) (12) tax designation. "As part of that tax designation, which establishes us as a cooperative, we are required to allocate margins in the form of capital credits to our members as annually determined by our board of directors. Refunding capital credits to our members is one of the many things that make electric cooperatives unique." ⚡

News in LPEA Dispatch

After completing the two-year Apprentice Dispatch program, Rachel Killinen has earned full status as a Dispatcher at La Plata Electric Association (LPEA). Also, Journeyman Lineman Aaron Renner has joined the Dispatch team.

LPEA's Dispatch team oversees LPEA's system operations. Dispatchers monitor power flows and voltage, field calls when problems occur within LPEA's service area, trouble-shoot outages and dispatch crews to restore power.



Rachel Killinen

Born and raised in Durango, Rachel Killinen holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from the University of Phoenix. She spent the bulk of her professional career in the insurance industry, and is a licensed agent in the State of Colorado. She also served as office manager for Alternative Elevations, an elevator inspection company, and was a self-employed process server in the town of Kremmling, Colo. before coming to LPEA.

Aaron Renner joined LPEA as an Apprentice Lineman in 2007 and completed the four-year program earning him the position of Journeyman Lineman in 2011. He has been in the field, constructing and maintaining LPEA's electric power distribution lines and facilities since that time.

Originally from Manassa, Colo. in the San Luis Valley, Renner attended Mesa Hotline School in Grand Junction. Upon graduation in 2007 he worked as an equipment operator for a short time with Par Electrical in Aurora before the LPEA apprenticeship position opened up.

Renner was a member of the line crew honored by both the American Red Cross Southwest Colorado Chapter and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) for life-saver awards, recognized for the rescue of a motorcyclist who had been pinned under a large trailer. ⚡



Aaron Renner

Apprentice linemen welcomed

Justin Barnum and Michael Juliano have been named to the Apprentice Lineman program at LPEA, working toward earning their Journeyman Lineman and joining the profession responsible for constructing and maintaining electric power distribution lines and facilities.

Raised on a farm in Washington State, Justin Barnum worked as a Dish network technician and manager before attending Northwest Lineman College in Denton, Tex.

"I'd thought about being a lineman for quite a while," says Barnum, who was pleased when the LPEA apprenticeship position opened up as his wife was born and raised in Bayfield.

Michael Juliano is a native of Bayfield and has spent the past nine years working for Hydro-X as a hydrovac operator and ultimately operations manager.

"I've done some work for La Plata through that and it got me interested in being a lineman, seeing these guys at work," says Juliano.

LPEA's program is sanctioned by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers as well as the Department of Labor. The four-year apprentice program includes 8000 hours on-the-job, working with mentor linemen in the field, as well as simultaneous scholastic study in the evenings, and written examinations.

"Employer-sponsored apprenticeship programs are the best educational and training tools our industry ever invented," says Justin Talbot, LPEA manager of operations. ⚡



Justin Barnum and Michael Juliano