

WATT'S UP

AT LA PLATA ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION
MARCH 2016



Photo: Pat Fahrion

Reliability: A top priority

Journeyman Lineman Bill Holtsford and Apprentice Lineman Ty Mortensen help ensure the reliability of LPEA's system.

It could be luck. It could be planning. Likely it's a combination of both, but truth is, in spite of some big winter storms, LPEA has suffered no significant outages this season.

"We hear on the news all the time how tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of people in the east or midwest are knocked out of power due to winter storm damage," says Justin Talbot, manager of operations. "Though El Niño hasn't been as bad as anticipated, we have had a great deal of snow that could have done damage to our system – but it hasn't."

LPEA has an aggressive and pro-active maintenance program across its nearly 3,650 miles of line, linked by 32 sub-stations. Indeed, LPEA's Operations Team takes the first part of the cooperative's mission statement to heart: "...to provide safe, reliable electricity."

Each day, barring an outage, crews are assigned throughout Archuleta and La Plata inspecting, testing and performing scheduled maintenance to keep the system in top-notch shape – and able to withstand external challenges.

For example, currently, out-of-date transformers are being changed out in Archuleta County, with crews simultaneously installing raptor protection wire and devices on poles to mitigate eagle and hawk electrocution (and the significant outages that accompany such incidents).

"LPEA also contracts with a tree-trimming crew that works essentially year-round depending on weather,"

says Curt Marlatt, line superintendent. "They move throughout our service territory taking down hazard trees and branches. Downed trees and branches are typically a big cause of major outages in winter. We're keeping ahead of it."

The end of the recent "100 pole project" is also in sight, an effort that has replaced poles identified as failing or in need of repair. This was a special effort, done in addition to LPEA's regular pole inspection program that ensures that all poles are inspected every 10 years in rotation.

While equipment can fail in a substation, the substation techs also utilize pro-active efforts to spot a problem before it happens. For example, techs employ an infra-red camera that can spot bad or loose connections that could result in electricity loss or an outage.

The substations are also targets for animals seeking warmth and shelter. Though precautions are in place to help keep animals from coming in contact with electrified equipment, they're persistent, and a raccoon or a squirrel can knock thousands of people out of power with one wrong step. In 2016 LPEA has budgeted for additional animal protection features.

"We've still got some weather ahead of us," says Talbot. "Wet, sticky El Niño snow could come around this spring, but we'll continue with our maintenance program to help keep those lights on. And if Mother Nature does deal us a challenging hand, know your LPEA crews will be heading your way to get you back in power."

“Acing” LED lighting

It had been a challenging winter in 2014-2015. Terry Smith, owner of Terry's Ace Hardware, turned to LPEA to help with the high electric bill for the expansive store at 525 Navajo Trail Dr., Pagosa Springs.

Not only did CFO Dennis Svanes work with Smith to manage his bill, Svanes planted the seed that Smith should look into energy efficient LED lighting to reduce costs.

Coincidentally, Ace Hardware corporate had also launched an efficiency initiative, encouraging a change out to LED lighting.

“We went to an Ace convention and the guys from Feit had a program that analyzed the size of our store, how many bulbs we had,” says Smith of the light bulb manufacturer. “They plugged it in and showed us how much it would cost us, but also how much we would save.”

“It gave us an idea of the different options based on the types of lights we have,” says Manager Susan Garman, who shepherded the project.

Unfortunately, Garman discovered that updating to LEDs in a large facility with multiple applications is not that simple, and she was flooded from a variety of sales sources. Enter LPEA's Ray Pierotti.

“A lot of people don't realize the benefits of a cooperative,” says Project Specialist Pierotti. “We're here to help people – not to make a profit.”

And help Terry's Ace Hardware Pierotti did – over the past year consulting with Garman to walk through change out of more than 1,600 light bulbs.

Terry's Ace Hardware began retrofitting lighting in December, with financing assistance from Ace corporate, as the total job cost was nearly \$30,000. A side benefit was that Smith was able to use existing employees, keeping several staff members employed through the down days of winter.

With the lighting retrofit complete, the store will realize more than a \$9,000 per year reduction in the electric bill. So even though the retrofit was a significant investment, the cost savings and a rebate from LPEA of \$5,716 will ensure a return on investment in less than three years.

Another benefit is that lighting throughout the store has improved dramatically, according to Garman, but one key area was the furniture department.

“With the other lighting, it was dim, and the colors got distorted,” she says. “Now this is a true color, which we didn't get with the old fluorescents.”

Terry's is now a flagship for LEDs, offering a wide variety for its Pagosa neighbors.

“We did a reset on our lighting department,” says Smith. “All of us here are committed to reducing our carbon footprint. We do have customers coming in who are madder than wet hens that they can't get their 60-watt incandescent bulbs anymore. But we are the cheerleaders for the future and are here to educate. And LPEA has been a great partner.”



Beneath rows of new LED lighting, Susan Garman and Terry Smith enjoy the completion of Terry's Ace Hardware energy efficient lighting retrofit.

LPEA Service Awards announced

With 2016, LPEA has ushered in new, quarterly employee meetings, during which – in addition to sharing vital company information with all employees – employment milestones are honored. During the First Quarter meeting the following Service Awards were announced:

Cindy Straight,
Billing
Administrator
– 40 years

Randy Neil,
Mechanic
– 40 years

Guy Fine,
Substation
Maintenance
– 30 years

Betsy Lovelace, Customer Service
Supervisor – 30 years

Lorraine Gurule, Engineering Clerk
– 30 years

Rhonda Gregg, Payroll Specialist
– 20 years

Dave Gebhardt, Major Projects
Engineer – 20 years

Pat Fahrion, Working Foreman
– 20 years

Steve Lynch, Substation Maintenance
– 20 years

Steve Haning, District Storekeeper
– 15 years

Gary Hubbs, Working Foreman
– 15 years

Bret Cochrane, Regulatory,
Compliance and Safety
Superintendent – 15 years

Jerry Sutherlin, Serviceman
– 15 years

George Morgan, Lead Meter Reader
Collector – 15 years

Aubrey Gillespie, Customer Service
Representative – 5 years



To further education on new technology and lighting “change-outs,” Pierotti will host a “Lunch & Lights” workshop on Mar. 23, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. in Pagosa Springs. Visit www.lpea.coop for additional information or RSVP to Pierotti directly at rpierotti@lpea.coop.

So long Steve Gregg!

Chief Operating Officer Steve Gregg, after delaying his retirement for more than a year, is now off to the lake – retiring from LPEA in February.

A 44-year veteran of LPEA, Gregg began his career as an equipment operator. He held several positions within Operations – primarily construction and equipment maintenance – until he had the opportunity to join the Engineering Department as a Design Staker, part of the team that helps design the electrical system. After six years as a Staker, he moved into right-of-way work.

During his 10-year tenure in Engineering, Gregg assisted Colorado Ute (predecessor of Tri-State Generation and Transmission) in designing/building the major 115 transmission line from the north La Plata County line through the Animas Valley and around the City of Durango, as well as construction of the initial distribution lines in the Vallecito Reservoir area.

In the 1990s he returned to Operations as a Line Superintendent, overseeing the work of the line crews. In 2005 he was promoted to Manager of Operations where he oversaw all aspects of the system and its reliability for nine years.

In 2014, Gregg stepped in as Interim CEO, subsequently appointed to Chief Operating Officer when new CEO Mike Dreyspring took the helm.



Time-of-Use rate reduced

LPEA has reduced the cost for members using electricity in “off-peak” periods as part of the Time-of-Use (TOU) program, effective Mar. 1, 2016.

The “off-peak” rate for those in the TOU program drops 7.7 percent, from 6.5¢ per kWh to 5.9¢ per kWh, to help encourage members to shift their electricity usage to “off-peak” periods. The “on-peak” rate of 16.8¢ per kWh remains the same, as does the base charge (which covers LPEA’s fixed costs) of \$21.50 per month.

“Lowering the ‘off-peak’ rate goes far to re-invigorate our Time-of-Use program,” says Dan Harms, manager of rates, technology and energy policy. “One of our goals in managing electricity distribution is to level off usage and not experience ‘spikes’ in demand for power. Through Time-of-Use our members can help us, and we want to financially reward them for shifting energy use to ‘off-peak’ periods.”

Going forward, LPEA will no longer delineate between regular TOU participants and those who have ETS (Electric Thermal Storage) heaters. All TOU participants will now realize lower, “off-peak” rates 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., plus all day Sunday and Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Call 970.247.5786 to learn more about Time-of-Use.

Compton earns “Director Gold”



LPEA Board Vice President Tom Compton has earned the Director Gold credential offered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

This certificate recognizes directors who have earned their Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) or Board Leadership Certificate (BLC) and are committed to continuing their education throughout their service on the board. Compton has served on the LPEA board since 1998 and is a Credentialed Cooperative Director.

The Director Gold credential helps directors comply with laws, understand evolving technologies, and apply leading governance practices.

“Continuing education is considered a way for directors to keep abreast of changes in this continually evolving and challenging industry,” says LPEA CEO Mike Dreyspring. “We truly appreciate Tom’s service and commitment to LPEA and the industry as a whole.”

LIVE WIRES

Board meeting Mar. 16, 9 a.m.

The next meeting of the LPEA Board of Directors is set for Wednesday, Mar. 16, 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.

Watch for member survey

LPEA wants your input! Watch for your member satisfaction survey to arrive with your paper or e-bill this month, and please participate.

Candidate petition deadline

Deadline for cooperative members to submit information and petitions to run for the LPEA Board of Directors is 1 p.m., Mar. 11. For more information visit www.lpea.coop. Direct questions to Jeannie Bennett, 970.382.3505.

Spring forward!

Daylight Saving Time begins Mar. 13. Be sure to set your clocks ahead one hour.



Maintaining the system...

Looking toward Engineering of tomorrow

BY RON MEIER | MANAGER OF ENGINEERING | RMEIER@LPEA.COOP

I'm writing this on Superbowl Sunday, sitting at the Denver airport. Colors of blue and orange abound.

I'm on my way to Washington D.C. to speak about our Time-of-Use [TOU] program before the Academy of Sciences. We've been asked to share our story, as almost 30 years ago LPEA initiated our TOU program – long before most in our industry had ever heard of the idea. Policy makers in D.C. want to know what we've learned. They will hear about the development of technologies such as our Electric Thermal Storage heat; policy decisions made by our power supplier that essentially gutted our program for a time; and how the success of our TOU program created challenges in the world of physics on our grid.

The Engineering team, along with everyone at LPEA, works daily

to solve challenges presented to our cooperative. We've had a good winter thus far, and had limited outages. We've designed the system well, and this is a challenge to which we're accustomed.

However, as we look toward tomorrow, our team is faced with new and different challenges. While many have heard me say that we need to be careful of those who bring us "solutions" looking for challenges to solve [rather than focusing on challenges first before we seek solutions] – truth is, the new challenges are here.

Today our membership seeks to use our electrical system in ways it wasn't originally designed for. Every Photovoltaic System [aka PV] that comes online adds a dynamic challenge. How can we keep this momentum toward distributed generation going when the electric system is reaching its "hosting" capacity? We already have areas on our system where the hosting capacity is exhausted, and we have to tell members that exporting energy to the grid from their PV system isn't possible – something we don't like to do.

We are exploring new technologies to expand our hosting

capacity, but the process takes time. For example, all in the industry are considering energy storage, such as batteries, but what is the best technology? Which solutions are really ready to operate over the long term, versus those still coming off the drawing boards?

To give you an idea, we have been approached by a new company that is bringing "fly wheel" technology for energy storage. Imagine a 4,000-lb. fly-wheel being spun up when either there is excess [PV] generation coming on to our grid, or when the energy to spin it up costs LPEA less. We could then take the spinning [stored] energy out of the wheel and convert it back to electricity during those times when the cost of electricity from our power supplier is higher. Is this technology better than batteries? That's a question we're trying to answer. This is just one of many new challenges facing our cooperative.

In a few hours, as I am in the air, the Broncos will be on the field taking on the challenge of the Superbowl. By the time this article finds its way in front of you, we will all know the results; but until then "Go Broncos!"

Mailing Address:
PO Box 2750 Durango, CO 81302-2750

Street Address:
45 Stewart St. Durango, CO 81303
603 S. 8th St. Pagosa Springs, CO 81147

970.247.5786 | www.lpea.coop

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

Board of Directors:
Michael Rendon, President [District 3]
Tom Compton, Vice President [District 2]
Karen Barger, Treasurer [District 4]
Jeff Berman, Secretary [District 3]
Britt Bassett [District 3]
Bob Formwalt [District 1]
Mark Garcia [District 1]
Bob Lynch [District 1]
Kohler McInnis [District 2]
Davin Montoya [District 2]
Jack Turner [District 4]
Joe Wheeling [District 4]

Chief Executive Officer:
Michael A. Dreysspring

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.

