

WATT'S UP

AT LA PLATA ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

AUGUST 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]
Tom Compton [District 2]
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.



Steady as she goes

BY STEVE GREGG | INTERIM CEO | SGREGG@LPEA.COOP

As has been well-publicized, LPEA said good-bye to our CEO Greg Munro last month. I can tell you that during his tenure, Greg built and maintained a strong and stable company. As a great boss, he was skilled at hiring and nurturing very good people. As he has said, the employees at LPEA are some of the finest. Believe me, a company as diverse, as large and with such great responsibility as maintaining distribution of electricity, cannot be micro-managed. Greg knew how to be a great captain. And the ship is on a steady course.

Finding a replacement for Greg is a comprehensive process, and the Board of Directors is taking their responsibility for selecting a new CEO very seriously. I am honored to step in and keep the ship on an even keel until he or she gets up to speed.

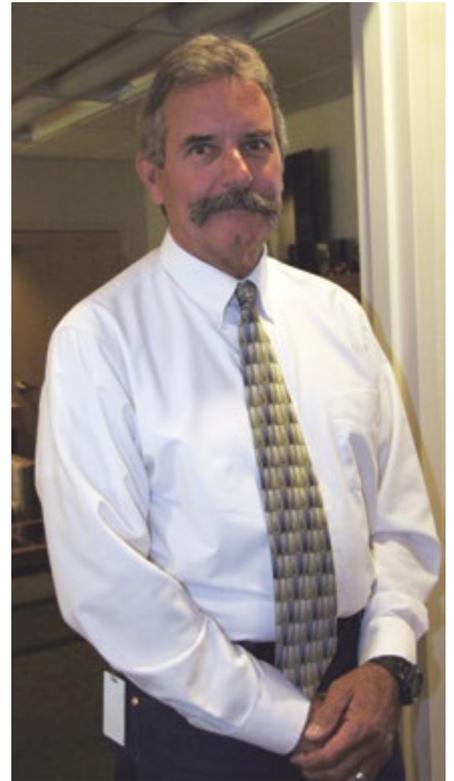
I want our members to know that our employees are committed to keeping the lights on, maintaining and upgrading the system, and doing so with a strong fiscal responsibility. Everybody across the board – from the Operations team to Corporate Services, to Engineering to Accounting, Billing and Customer Service – is stepping up.

Yes, we are seeing a big evolution in our staff, as Greg is not the only one to retire. The good news is, we've been preparing and over the years we have been promoting and training younger blood, especially in Operations. There is a learning curve as our linemen move into supervisory positions, but they're smart, they're motivated, and most of all, they care about LPEA and our members, so it all will be just fine.

We're also hiring new folks to fill the voids left from the promotions. In the next several months you'll notice more announcements in these pages of CCL. But it's all good. Because LPEA has a reputation across the country for being a great cooperative to work for (plus Durango/Pagosa Springs are idyllic places to live), we are in the envious position to be able to select the cream of the crop.

Change is always difficult. But as I told my Operations team, I've worked under six CEOs during my career – so I went through a "transition" five times. I have assured them that the new CEO will be interested in the health of the company. As long as everyone is fulfilling their roles in maintaining our mission and keeping those lights on, a good CEO will respect that.

Essentially, the Board of Directors has one employee – the CEO – so your Board of Directors has been whittling down the candidates. Until the new person is in place, please know I will do my best to manage the team, keep the company stable and provide you with the best service possible. ☀



LIVE WIRES

Board of Directors Meeting

The next meeting of the LPEA Board of Directors is set for Wednesday, Aug. 20, 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.

Annual Meeting 2015

LPEA's Annual Meeting has been set for Saturday, May 16, 2015 at Pagosa Springs High School. Details to come.

Impacted by TOU rate change? Tell the PUC

LPEA Members interested in informing the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) of the impact Tri-State's new rate structure (for Time-of-Use) has had on their family or business can write a letter to the PUC at 1560 Broadway, Suite 250, Denver, CO 80202. If writing, be sure to reference the PUC Case Number: 13F-0145E. Information on the complaint is at www.lpea.coop.

Follow us on Twitter

If you follow La Plata Electric Association on Twitter, you can receive notices and updates on major outages. LPEA endeavors to keep members and the media as informed as possible about outage causes and estimates for repairs. 

Directors elect board officers

During its regularly scheduled Board of Directors meeting, June 18, LPEA board members elected Michael Rendon (District 3) to serve as 2014-2015 president, with Heather Erb (District 4) re-elected as vice president. Jeff Berman (District 3) and Mark Garcia (District 1) were elected as secretary and treasurer, respectively. Collectively, the four make up the board's Executive Committee.

Joe Wheeling (District 4) will maintain his seat on the Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association board, and Berman and Bob Formwalt (District 1) will continue as the representatives for the Colorado Rural Electric Association (CREA) and Western United boards, respectively. Jack Turner (District 4) and newly-elected board member Bob Lynch (District 1) will sit on the LPEA Round Up Foundation board.

As per the LPEA by-laws, officers are elected each year at the first board meeting following the cooperative's annual meeting, which in 2014 was May 22. Complete biographies of and contact information for all LPEA board members are available on LPEA's web site, www.lpea.coop/company_info/board/district_map. 

Gregg named Interim CEO

After 20+ years at LPEA, CEO Greg Munro said good-bye to the cooperative on July 31, and to bridge the gap until the Board of Directors selects his replacement, Steve Gregg, manager of operations, has been selected as Interim CEO.

A 42-year veteran of LPEA, Gregg began his career as an equipment operator with the cooperative. 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.

"I did that for about six years and then moved into right-of-way work," says Gregg, of the job that involves negotiation of access for lines. "I think everybody should have to do a little bit of right-of-way work. It is the most humbling job... and you meet people all across the board – some not so eager to assist, to those who want to help the cooperative as they recognize there was a day that there was no electricity and they want to help build the system out to others."

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, CEO Greg Munro promoted him to Manager of Operations where he has overseen all aspects of the system and its reliability.

"I'm confident the Board of Directors will select a very qualified CEO who will be looking at the health of the company," says Gregg. "As soon as he or she is fully up to speed, I'll be officially retiring as well. The lake is calling."

A month shy of being a Durango native (he was born in Delta, Colo.), Gregg is an avid outdoorsman. 



LPEA Board President Michael Rendon welcomes Steve Gregg as Interim CEO

FastTrack Stock redeemed

It was a good investment.

In September 2010, LPEA and sister cooperative Empire Electric (in Montezuma County) took the leap of faith to support FastTrack Communications, the cooperatives' wholly-owned telecom subsidiary, as it worked to expand its network. The co-ops invested a total of \$800,000 (LPEA - \$610,000, Empire - \$190,000) purchasing shares of Preferred Stock in FastTrack.

This past spring, FastTrack (which was recently named one of Colorado's Top Companies to Watch) returned the favor. After having enhanced its fiber network to meet the needs of several large customers, plus completing a build-out of the backbone to Bayfield, enhancing that service, FastTrack redeemed the shareholders' Preferred Stock at current fair market value. Recently, FastTrack presented a check for \$768,846 to out-going CEO Greg Munro, plus \$239,478 was presented to Empire, for a total payout to shareholders of \$1,008,324.

"We are very pleased with FastTrack's growth and fiscal management," says Munro. "The company has enhanced the economic viability of the region and improved connectivity for LPEA members - and there's more to come."

FastTrack, a Competitive Local Exchange Carrier (CLEC) with a mission to bring high speed Internet to the area's rural communities, now has more than 420 miles of fiber optic network lines connecting primary markets in Colorado and New Mexico. The fully-ringed network offers a direct, affordable Internet connection via fiber versus copper. Local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) also benefit from FastTrack's fiber optics, allowing them to grow their services.

"There are really two things that enable national and international businesses in southwest Colorado to succeed: air service and Internet," says Roger Zalneraitis, executive director, La Plata County Economic Alliance. "FastTrack provides virtually unlimited high speed Internet through its fiber network, and backs its service with terrific engineers and great customer service."

FastTrack was one of 50 businesses in Colorado, out of 1,200 nominees, named among the Colorado Companies to Watch in 2014. Criteria focuses on businesses that contribute significantly to Colorado's economy through generation of jobs, creating innovations that transform industries and displaying entrepreneurial leadership in the creation of amazing workplaces and support for their communities.

LPEA owns 76.25 percent of FastTrack (with Empire owning 23.75 percent). Both LPEA and Empire maintain seats on FastTrack's Board of Directors. For additional information visit www.fasttrackcomm.net. ⚙️



FastTrack General Manager Kelly Hebbard and former CEO Greg Munro complete the redemption of FastTrack's Preferred Stock.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

TIP OF THE MONTH



Refrigerators, even new energy efficient models, can use a little assistance to maximize their efficiency during warm summer months. Did you know that it's best to keep the fridge and freezer FULL, as a full unit doesn't have to work as hard to cool the warm air that enters when you open the door? Ice bags in a freezer help as well.

When you have leftovers hot off the grill, let them cool a bit before putting them in the fridge. Health and safety do come first, so don't leave leftovers out too long, but waiting just a few minutes to put hot food away will mean your fridge isn't working as hard to cool it down.

Also, clean out and organize the refrigerator. An organized fridge means less time spent staring at questionable containers and digging around for the items you need.

And it may seem a no-brainer, but shut the door. The more you open your refrigerator and freezer doors, the more cold air escapes and warm air seeps in - and the more energy you use. ⚙️

Golf for a good cause

LPEA enjoyed one of its most successful Golf Tournaments at the Pagosa Springs Golf Course, Saturday, June 21, with a completely full field of 33 teams. More than \$8,000 was raised, with \$6,000 presented to the Archuleta County Search & Rescue by event coordinator Mike Alley. Also, Archuleta's two food banks each received \$1,000 with area youth programs enjoying additional donations.

Organized by LPEA's line personnel, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (Local IBEW 111 26A) based in Pagosa Springs, the LPEA Golf Tournament is designed to "give back" to the community. Since its inception in 2003, the event has become a tradition and raised more than \$50,000 for a variety of non-profit entities in Archuleta County, including the Hospice of Mercy, Pagosa Early Learning Center, Archuleta County Victim Assistance and the Darin Rome Memorial Scholarship for aspiring music students. ⚙️

STEPHENSON RETIRES FROM LPEA



After literally a lifetime in and around the electric utility business, John Stephenson has decided it's time to spend more time with family, as well as on the land, so has retired from LPEA. Stephenson most recently served as Safety and Regulatory Compliance Line Supervisor.

A native of Durango, whose father worked at numerous power plants, including the one that is now the Powerhouse Science Center, Stephenson served in the U.S. Air Force as part of a mobile combat team assigned to the Army. He returned to Durango, but soon went into the electric utility industry with Nevada Power, where he earned his Journeyman Lineman and climbed the ladder to Superintendent.

In 2000 the opportunity to return to Durango as a Journeyman Lineman with LPEA opened up.

"I asked the wife if she wanted to go back," says Stephenson, who received a resoundingly positive "yes" from his wife. "So we came back here and I ended up in the Safety department after a year or so on the line crew, and here we are." ☀

24-7-365 Kiosk to open soon

To better serve LPEA members, 24 hours-7 days a week-365 days a year, LPEA will soon open a new drive-through kiosk at its Durango office. The equipment shipped in late July and construction is underway as this goes to press.

"So often it's not convenient because of work schedules, etc. for some of our members to come by the office during regular business hours," says Dennis Svanes, CFO. "This new kiosk will help with scheduling, but also offers a number of additional services to members."

The self-serve kiosk enables members to pay their bills by credit card, bank debit card, check and even cash (though the kiosk can't make change, so any excess payment will be credited to a member's account).

Payments will be immediately posted to a member's account, so there's no delay or potential for the electricity to be disconnected because of non-payment.

"Members will need to know their account number or bring their paper bills with its bar code to scan," adds Svanes. "The full bill will be available for viewing on the kiosk screen."

The existing Drop Box will still be available for convenient payment drop-off adjacent to the new kiosk. And during business hours, the lobby counter inside will still be staffed for service. Those wishing to apply credit via the established Prepay card system, must visit LPEA's service counters.

LPEA members can also still pay from home by credit card by logging on to SmartHub at www.lpea.coop. Due to new PCI compliance regulations, LPEA personnel can no longer verbally take payments over the phone, though payments can be made through LPEA's automated IVR system.

"Or you can always sign up for auto-pay, with payments charged to your credit card or bank account," says Svanes. "We're endeavoring to offer out members as many options as possible for keeping current on their account." ☀



Serviceman Cochrane earns promotion

Bret Cochrane, serviceman at LPEA, has been promoted to Safety and Regulatory Compliance Superintendent. Cochrane fills the position vacated by John Stephenson, who retired in early July.

In his new position, Cochrane will be responsible for overseeing LPEA's safety "culture," helping ensure that safety is embraced as a core value at all levels of the cooperative. He also will oversee regulatory compliance and loss control at the cooperative, monitoring LPEA's operations to continue to meet all industry regulations, as well as avoid workplace accidents.

"It's going to be a challenge, but that's a good thing," says Cochrane, who assures that "safety" is a passion for him as well as everyone at LPEA.

A native of southwest Kansas and 24-year veteran of the electric utility industry, Cochrane joined LPEA in 2000 from Pioneer Electric Cooperative, where he apprenticed and earned his Journeyman Lineman. He worked the line crews at LPEA until December 2013 when he became a Serviceman, working more closely with members.

"All of our retirements are allowing our younger Operations employees to move up the proverbial ladder," says Steve Gregg, interim CEO. "As a result, we will soon be hiring more apprentices to come in at entry level. It's all succession planning." ☀

