

Shaping the future by building trustworthy community partnerships as an innovative, forward-thinking industry leader, delivering excellence in our member-owned cooperative.

JULY 2019



Alumni Profile:

LPEA's retired "Lighting Guy" is "illuminated" in Southeast Asia

BY RAY PIEROTTI | LPEA PROJECT SPECIALIST - RETIRED



After being so visible for so many years to all co-op members in La Plata and Archuleta counties serving as LPEA's "Lighting Guy" and helping us all better understand LED lighting, Ray Pierotti retired last year, and he took off to explore the world. First up was a trip to India and Southeast Asia. Sounds like a trip of a lifetime... There's a "coffee table" book of his photography in the office.

Being recently retired, my motivation was "travel large" while I am still fit and able. I rented my house and left with a one-way ticket – and it turned into a five-month adventure.

Photographing the journey, the people and places were my major motivations. I was able to share my trip with social media, as well as with the many other travelers I met on the journey.

Traveling by trains and buses, seeing hundreds of temples, Mosques, monasteries and palaces – the trip was a visual and cultural feast. (Also being a "foodie," the sampling of so many foods and flavors was a daily highlight.) Once in a destination, transportation might be a TukTuk, or 3-wheeler, taxi, renting bicycle or scooter. My accommodation might be a guesthouse, hotel or dorm (and I even found a place to rent a paddleboard).

India was my first stop. A cultural high point was Varanasi in India, observing burning of bodies and releasing the ashes into the Ganges.

Sri Lanka is a gem not to be forgotten with its beautiful, kind people, and island with mountains, beaches, hill country and religious landmarks. It's a top recommendation for travel.

Myanmar was also a favorite, with people who were so welcoming and a concentration of Buddha temples, statues and monasteries everywhere you traveled. Other highlights were taking the "slow boat" from LAOS to Thailand on the Mekong River and touring by bicycle the largest temple complex in the world at Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Diving in the beautiful waters of Maldives, with shark viewing, unequaled anywhere in the world.

Add to that the four-day motorbike ride in the mountains of Northern Vietnam to the China border – it was the BEST. I met up with a caravan of Monks and Nuns who included me in their meals and lodging as we randomly and magically encountered.

Often asked what I got out of the trip, it would be the beautiful people in all the countries I visited. The diversity of the land, and realization the world is a colorful, rich, very poor and accepting place. The war torn history and reminders of "The Killing fields of Cambodia" and the "American War" (as it is called in Vietnam) has been forgotten and forgiven through the generations.

The other side of the world is also extremely over-populated, polluted in air quality, and garbage strewn in so much of the land. And take a look at what their electrical service looks like. Folks can complain about LPEA's service, but... really?

More than ever, I most appreciate what I have living here, in Durango, in the USA, with our clean air, blue skies, and endless miles of pristine beautiful land, and most of all, our many freedoms.

Pierotti now has his eye on spending months in South America. In his travels he's learning, this is true, but he's also helping "enlighten" these countries and their people with all that he has amassed in his many years working with LPEA.

COLOMB NAMED BILLING SUPERVISOR



Jennifer Colomb has been named Billing Supervisor at La Plata Electric Association (LPEA), promoted from her role as Billing Clerk. Colomb joined LPEA's Finance and Accounting Department as a Billing Clerk in January 2017.

Billing management is a central and crucial aspect of LPEA's day-to-day operations, with a team of professionals overseeing more than 43,000 meters and associated bills. Working in coordination with LPEA's finance personnel and customer service representatives, Colomb will continue to assist customers with billing concerns as well as troubleshooting meter reading and billing issues, as well as managing duties of all Billing Clerks. She will also assist accounting personnel with energy sales information, budget preparation, and accounts reconciliation.

Colomb earned her first bachelor's degree in psychology from Trinity University in San Antonio, Tex., and recently completed her BS in accounting through Colorado State University.

With a Pennsylvania family heritage that dates back prior to the Revolutionary War, Colomb came to LPEA with a professional background in loans and forensic mortgage analysis.

Fire prevention initiated

With safety in mind, LPEA continues to ensure that electrical equipment damage or repair efforts don't contribute to fire danger.

"Safety is a number one priority for LPEA and our crews," says Justin Talbot, manager of operations. "Summer is typical for us to start enforcing pro-active fire safety measures. What this may mean is that, with our safety steps and checks, in the event of an outage, it will take us a little longer to restore power, and we hope our members will understand."

At a location where line/equipment damage has prompted an outage, linemen will do extra patrols of the affected section of line to make certain no other flammable objects are touching the electrical equipment. Only then will the all-clear be given and the line re-energized. The linemen will then remain at the location to ensure no embers are smoldering.

"These steps will lengthen our response time just a little, for precautionary purposes, which could be very important if a fire has been sparked," says Talbot. "Also, all our vehicles are equipped with watering systems to douse any sparked fires."

LPEA has line personnel on stand-by throughout the night – one Journeyman Lineman each in Durango, Bayfield/Ignacio and Pagosa Springs. In the event of more serious conditions, additional line personnel will be called to an outage location.

"We coordinate closely with county emergency personnel so we can be ready and in place if a fire approaches our electrical system, such as a distribution line, transmission line or substation," says Talbot.

"We're also asking our customers to be aware – be our eyes," says Toby Allred, line superintendent. "If you've got an outage, go outside and survey your property, as well as your neighbors', for downed power lines, smoke or a visible fire."

LPEA advises, if members notice any indication of fire, call 9-1-1 immediately – then call LPEA at 970.247.5786, and stay away from all downed powerlines.

LPEA to survey members

To help determine members' opinions of electricity delivery practices and reliability, plus better serve its members in the future, LPEA has contracted with NRECA Market Research Services to survey a sampling of households in La Plata and Archuleta counties. The telephone and online surveys are scheduled to begin July 29, 2019, and run for two weeks.

"The overall objective of the study is to measure current residential member satisfaction with the co-op and the trends over time," says Ron Meier, manager of engineering and member relations who is working with NRECA, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. "Each time we have NRECA conduct a study we learn more about our members' evolving attitudes and opinions, and we use the information to shape the cooperative's practices and goals."

Survey telephone calls will be placed during evening hours, between 5 and 9 p.m. and no calls will be made on Sundays. More than 400 households will be arbitrarily selected and surveyed, and LPEA requests that those who do receive the calls or email notifications participate. The survey takes about 5 minutes, and responses are confidential.

"However, if a member has a specific issue or question and wants to speak with a representative of LPEA, the surveyor will take down the contact information, and we will follow up and do what we can," says Meier.

"And customers living in wooded areas, look up," adds Allred. "Look at the trees that are near the electrical lines. If you notice large branches that could potentially fall through the lines on a windy day, or a dead tree in the right-of-way, give us a call. We will come check it out and if it is a potential hazard, we can take care of it."

Direct additional questions to LPEA at 970.247.5786.

Future of Power Supply Information Series

Energy is a complicated industry, but at LPEA we endeavor to do all we can to help keep you informed, as well as gather your input. To that end, plan to attend one of four up-coming interactive, informational sessions to discuss the future of our power.

- July 1 – Ross Aragon Center, Pagosa Springs
- July 2 – Forest Lakes Community Center, Bayfield
- July 10 – LPEA Corporate Office Board Room, Durango
- July 11 – Ignacio Community Library

“The presentations will cover what LPEA is exploring for future power supply, including results from the Power Supply Committee, as well as the next steps we’re exploring,” says Dan Harms, manager of rates, technology and energy policy. “We will also look at what Tri-State Generation and Transmission, our primary power supplier, is doing, and further discuss LPEA’s Strategic Goal of reducing our carbon foot print.”

All presentations are scheduled for 5:30 p.m. RSVP not required, but appreciated: jbennett@lpea.coop.

LPEA staff members complete management program

Nadine Ontiveros, manager of human resources, and Rachel Gilman, interim CFO, have completed the Robert I. Kabat Management Internship Program (MIP). MIP is an intensive program offered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin, and designed to guide participants through all facets of the electric utility industry.

Exclusive to top-level management from rural electric cooperatives, MIP includes education in new, innovative management techniques and the unique principles that govern the operations of electric cooperatives as well as providing a greater understanding of co-op membership needs, and how to meet those needs. As the industry continues to evolve, so has MIP, and Ontiveros and Gilman were privileged to have concentrated focus on the changes in the electric utility industry.



Nadine Ontiveros



Rachel Gilman

CO-OP MEMBERS

Ask...

Q: What was going on with the unusual helicopter flying the transmission line between Bayfield and Pagosa last month? With all the fears about our grid, it was a little unsettling.

A: Yes, that was LPEA partnering with ESC Engineering to conduct a helicopter flyover/data collection of LPEA’s transmission assets in east La Plata County and west Archuleta County. The effort was part of LPEA’s on-going maintenance program to ensure reliability and upgrade service to members in Archuleta County. It’s an efficient and cost effective way to gather data and inspect the lines located in rugged and forested terrain, such as the San Juan National Forest. We anticipate improvements to be made and new equipment to be built along that corridor to ensure reliability. But the first step is gathering data. ESC is an electrical engineering consulting firm that provides a full spectrum of services, including design, planning, control systems and automation integration.

LIVE WIRES

Board meeting July 17, 9 a.m.

The next meeting of the LPEA Board of Directors is set for Wednesday, July 17, 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. View the meeting’s livestream that day, logging on to the LPEA website.

LPEA offices closed

In honor of Independence Day, LPEA offices in Durango and Pagosa Springs will be closed on Thursday, July 4.

Save the Date!

LPEA will host its Member Appreciation Luncheons in Durango, Wednesday, September 11, and in Pagosa Springs, Thursday, September 12, at the co-op’s offices, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Stay tuned for details.

Round Up Grants

The following organizations received Round Up or Educational grants, distributed by the Round Up Foundation Board of Directors, in June:

- Tara Historical Society
- Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Southwest Colorado
- The Community Treehouse
- Durango Cowboy Poetry Gathering
- Durango Playfest



From the CEO “SUNSETS”

BY MIKE DREYSPRING | CEO | MDREYSPRING@LPEA.COOP



Everyone likes a picturesque sunset. They're especially fun to view while on the lake, on the slopes, or on the trail – or driving home from the office. I tend to think of it being an exclamation point on a good day.

I enter retirement on Sept. 6. LPEA is the beautiful sunset of my career, and the color to my sunset is provided by some amazing people with whom I've been privileged to work. As the leader of the organization, I know I should be the source of inspiration, but the truth is, I've received much more than I've given. I have been so inspired by the people at LPEA – from Jerry Wills to Sue Maxwell, Ryan Carman to Tracy Allen, Amy Paylor to Les Hahn, and the list goes on and on and on.

Each of these LPEA employees, and many, many more have done exemplary things to serve you. Remember, they're “The Heart of Your Power.”

If you were at the annual meeting this year, you heard me recount what our line crews, under the leadership of Ryan Carman, did to make sure the 416 Fire didn't impact a major transmission line. The innovative idea was theirs, the work was done in the midst of a crises, and it was just another day at work for them. You would likely never know how that impacted the reliability of your electricity – but I know. And it inspires me to this day that I work with creative and innovative people that

care about serving you and contribute in meaningful ways.

If you've called in with a question or concern about your bill, you've probably talked to Amy or Tracy. Amy is behind the scenes in Durango, but in Pagosa you get to see Tracy. I get to see them regularly. I've seen and heard how they treat others and noted their compassion, professionalism and attentiveness – just a few of the ways LPEA “connects” to you, our members.

Many LPEA staff members review our Tri-State power bill each month, including me, in significant detail. It's a big bill, with big numbers, so we monitor it carefully. However, it took the incredibly meticulous work of Sue Maxwell to identify an error in our power bill that the rest of us missed. We informed Tri-State of the error and it was corrected. Sue used her own creative approach to analyze the bill and discovered the error. Wholesale power bill errors tend to get big in a hurry, so I was grateful she found this and it was corrected. These aren't things you'd typically be aware of, but I am.

Here's a problem – I need much more space than the word count this article allows to name all the employees who do things like this for you every day. I don't know *all* the stories. But I know more than I could have imagined, and I'll take those stories with me. I'd like to say they were inspired by me, the CEO, but it's not the case. It's truly the other way around. It's who LPEA's employees are.

I appreciated the opportunity to come to LPEA, live in an area of majestic beauty. The real bonus for me was, however, the beauty of the souls I encountered. I'll remember this sunset. And I'm grateful I could experience it.



Mission Statement:

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

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