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NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LPEA and FLC Unite to Empower Tomorrow's Entrepreneurs *\$60,000 Commitment Boosts Hawk Tank Competition and Promotes Innovation*

DURANGO, Colo. – La Plata Electric Association (LPEA) and Fort Lewis College (FLC) announced today that the cooperative will be the 2025-2028 Presenting Sponsor for FLC's tenth anniversary of its Hawk Tank Business Plan Competition. As presenting sponsor, LPEA will contribute \$20,000 annually over the next three years as part of its ongoing efforts to invest in the bright, innovative thinkers who are shaping the future.

Since 2015, the Shark Tank-inspired program has provided participants from Fort Lewis College, San Juan College, and local high schools with the opportunity to transform their business ideas into competitive and actionable plans. With the guidance of experienced program advisors and the support of community sponsors like LPEA, participants can refine their strategies. Winners are awarded cash prizes to help bring their business plans to life.

"At the heart of our cooperative values is a deep commitment to innovation and community investment," said Elizabeth Howe, LPEA VP of Business Services. "We believe that by supporting education and local initiatives, we not only strengthen our rural communities but also empower individuals to reach their full potential. This passion drives us to create opportunities that foster growth and resilience, which is why we are so excited to partner with Fort Lewis on Hawk Tank. Together, we can amplify our efforts to nurture talent and drive positive change in our community." Howe also serves as a member of the Business Advisory Council of the FLC Katz School of Business.

"We are incredibly grateful to LPEA for their generous support of Hawk Tank and its participants," said Steve Elias, Dean of the Katz School of Business at FLC. "Our sponsors don't just make this competition possible; they ensure its success by providing the essential funding that helps these talented individuals turn their innovative ideas into reality."

LPEA has a longstanding relationship of partnering with FLC to grow innovative programs, improve educational tools and resources, and spark a passion for learning and curiosity through career days, in-class presentations and other volunteer opportunities. As a cooperative guided by the principle of “Concern for Community,” LPEA's sponsorship of the Hawk Tank competition demonstrates their commitment to fostering local talent and supporting initiatives that drive economic growth and innovation.

The 2025 calendar of Hawk Tank workshops, information sessions and events will be published on the FLC website later this year, with the first information session kicking off in January. Students and alumni who are interested in participating can find more information at fortlewis.edu/hawktank.

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About LPEA

La Plata Electric Association (LPEA) is a member-owned, not-for-profit electric distribution cooperative serving La Plata and Archuleta counties, along with segments of Hinsdale, Mineral, and San Juan counties. Celebrating 85 years of dedicated service, LPEA stands as the fifth largest cooperative among 22 in Colorado, committed to delivering safe and reliable electricity at the lowest reasonable cost to approximately 36,500 members. In this exciting era of energy transition, LPEA focuses on integrating renewable solutions and enhancing energy efficiency, empowering communities to embrace a sustainable future while honoring its rich history. The cooperative is leading the way toward an innovative energy landscape.

About FLC

Fort Lewis College is the Southwest's leading undergraduate research institution with its low student-to-faculty ratio and one-on-one, affordable instruction. The experience students gain here is responsive to industry demand and the ever-shifting landscape of higher education. FLC is also one of the country's most diverse campuses, with over half its students identifying as people of color. With 60 majors to choose from, students become industry professionals, community leaders, and cutting-edge academics.