



Photo: Rally Constable

## Really making a difference

Rachel Schur Wagner celebrates the delivery of fresh water to the villagers in Nang Boat, Myanmar.

Cliff Field journeyed to Nicaragua.

The employees at LPEA are truly a part of everything you do in La Plata and Archuleta counties, but Staff Engineer Rachel Schur Wagner and intern Cliff Field took that tag line to a next level, traveling abroad and building water systems in Myanmar and Nicaragua as part of Fort Lewis College's Village Aid Project/Engineers Without Borders [VAP/EWB].

"My group traveled to Nang Boat. It's a Pa'O village of about 100 households in Myanmar," says Schur Wagner, referencing the country formerly known as Burma. "They are subsistence farmers, and we built their first real water system."

As she explains, the program has a five year commitment to a village, with the first year's team traveling in-country to gather GPS data. During the following fall semester, the faculty and Professional Partners work with the students to design the water system before embarking on the two-week in-country construction effort. [Schur Wagner is now a Professional Partner, though she has been involved with the program at Fort Lewis since her days as an engineering student.]

"It's a lot of work to get done quickly," she says, noting her team included 12 students and three Professional Partners, including FLC faculty advisor Laurie Williams. "The students are phenomenal. You work from sun up until after it's dark."

And they work side-by-side with the villagers, as that's part of the agreement and commitment from the village. Villagers have buy-in to the project [as well as gain an understanding of their new water system].

"Our goal is for everything to be sustainable for 20 years after we install it," says Field, a FLC senior, who traveled to La Cieba, a village of about 23 households in the mountains of Nicaragua.

The VAP/EWB teams trench from a fresh water source, typically a spring, to lay the transmission [pipe] line. In Nang Boat, that source [from which the villagers had been carrying water] was 2.25 miles. In La Ceiba, they transported water from a shallow stream.

The team then builds a large water tank, plus a smaller distribution system around the village with water taps at various locations.

"When we left, the water was flowing from every tap," says Field.

In coming years VAP/EWB teams will return to build latrines and ensure the entire system is functioning before moving on to new villages.

"I am continually touched by the generosity of all our employees at LPEA," says CEO Mike Dreyspring. "We are extremely proud of Rachel and Cliff, and I hope all our members are as well."

Village Aid Project/Engineers Without Borders provides students the opportunity to work on engineering-related projects that emphasize appropriate technology and sustainability in the developing world. It is all-volunteer, and projects – four per year that cost about \$20,000 each for materials purchased in-country – are made possible through community donations [the volunteers pay their own travel]. To support the program, visit [www.fortlewis.edu/ewb/SupportEWB](http://www.fortlewis.edu/ewb/SupportEWB) or contact Schur Wagner directly at [rschurwagner@lpea.coop](mailto:rschurwagner@lpea.coop).

## We asked...You responded: Member Survey results

This spring, LPEA invested in a survey of the full membership to determine member satisfaction and learn more about developing the company's strategic plan and vision going forward. LPEA retained consultant Donna Graves, of Information Services, to conduct the survey and tabulate the results, independent of LPEA.

"We wanted to get a baseline of our members' concerns and service," says CEO Mike Dreyspring. "We appreciate everyone who took the time to respond."

Paper surveys were inserted with bills physically mailed to customers, and LPEA members receiving e-bills were asked to fill out a secure on-line survey.

"Of the 30,793 surveys sent, including both paper and electronic, 3,869 responded, for a percentage return of about 13 percent," says Graves. "Based on traditional statistical analysis, we would have needed only 380 responses to have demonstrated 'statistical significance,' so we are very pleased with the response."

In order of importance, LPEA members ranked reliability of electric service as most important, with cost of electric service rated as the second most important area of concern. This tracked with the question that asked member satisfaction regarding reliability and cost. Of those responding, 42 percent were satisfied with the reliability of electric service, but only 19 percent were satisfied with the cost of electricity service from LPEA.

"This gives us some marching orders," says

Dreyspring. "Reliability is key, and our Operations Team works daily to help ensure we keep the electricity flowing to our members. Cost is a challenge, but as prices go up, we continually work with our members to improve efficiencies and help lower the bottom line of their bills."

An additional goal of the survey was to help determine how members preferred to receive information

from LPEA. Of those responding [and they were asked to check all that apply], 42 percent specified they preferred to receive information with their bills; 35 percent find *Colorado Country Life* a valuable resource; 26 percent noted e-mail notifications as a preference.

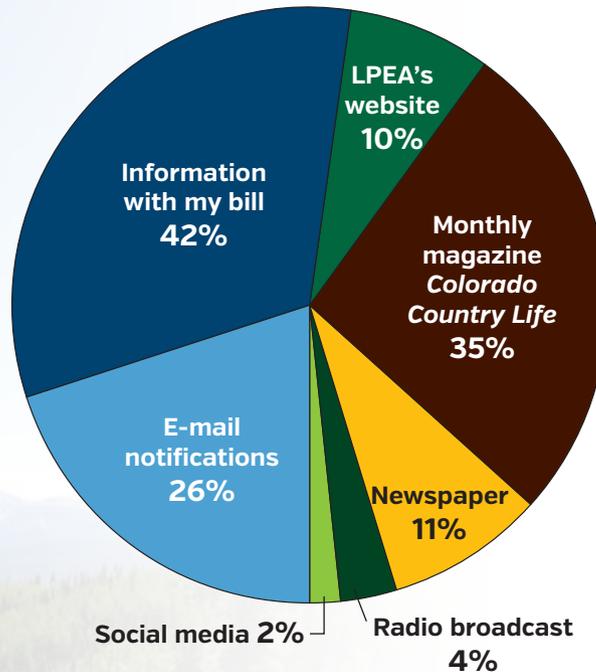
"The latter is interesting because percentage-wise, not very many LPEA members have signed up to receive email notifications or are following LPEA on Twitter," says Indiana Reed, marketing communications specialist. "We disseminate a great deal of information via our e-notifications. We encourage our members who would like to get news alerts from LPEA electronically to 'opt in' at [lpea.coop](http://lpea.coop) for news, and follow LPEA on Twitter, as well as visit our website."

To build on this initial effort, LPEA will conduct similar member

surveys in the future.

"One thing we were very pleased to see in the survey is that a majority of members responding have had a positive experience when contacting LPEA," says Dreyspring. "Customer service - in every department - is a priority. We're your neighbors and friends working to keep you in power and provide service however we can."

### I like to receive information from LPEA via:



## McIntyre joins Customer Service Team

There's a fresh face at the front desk in LPEA's Durango office as Julie McIntyre has joined the LPEA Customer Service Team. McIntyre works with LPEA members on billing issues, new accounts and the cooperative's various products and services.

McIntyre comes to LPEA after serving with La Plata County for three years in Recording and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Born and raised in Iowa, she served as a medic in the U.S. Army, which took her to Fort Carson, Colo., and she went on to serve the public sector for 23 years in Public Safety Communications in Fountain and then Longmont, Colo. She and her husband moved to Bayfield in 2012.

"Anybody you talk to says LPEA is the place to work," says McIntyre. "You hear nothing but good things, and I've found everything that everybody has said to be so true."

LPEA offers a variety of apprenticeships and employment opportunities. To explore employment visit [www.lpea.coop](http://www.lpea.coop).



# LPEA welcomes new Billing Clerks

Retirements and promotions opened up two new job opportunities at LPEA. Debra Herrera and Howard (“Howie”) Dickman are LPEA’s newest Billing Clerks.

Working in coordination with LPEA’s finance personnel and customer service representatives, the two assist customers with billing concerns as well as troubleshooting meter reading and billing issues.

Herrera, a Durango native, comes to LPEA from La Plata Services Associates, where she served as manager of the local company contracted to read LPEA’s electric meters. With LPEA transitioning to AMI meters, read remotely, meter reading is becoming automated, so Herrera sought an in-house job at LPEA.

Prior to her three years with La Plata Services, Herrera worked for 23 years for local medical billing company Prism Management, now New Directions of Durango, purchased by Herrera, her mother and aunt in 2013.

Dickman is a native of New York, but left Brooklyn for Dallas, Tex., to attend North Texas State University and secure his business degree. Following graduation, he handled contract housekeeping services for J.C. Penney in the Dallas area for nearly 30 years, managing 60 employees and care for 1.5 million square feet of space.

Succumbing to the lure of the mountains, Dickman and his wife moved to Durango in 2008. He first managed the Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory store in Downtown Durango, and went on to work with text book supplier Follett Corporation, servicing Fort Lewis College’s book purchase needs as an independent contractor.



## LIVE WIRES

### **Next Board meeting** **July 20, 9 a.m.**

The next LPEA Board meeting is Wednesday, July 20, 9 a.m., at LPEA headquarters in Durango. The agenda will be posted 10 days in advance of the meeting at [www.lpea.coop](http://www.lpea.coop). All members are reminded that public comment is heard at the beginning of the Board meeting.

### **Closed for the 4th of July**

LPEA’s offices in Durango and Pagosa Springs will be closed on Monday, July 4, 2016, in honor of Independence Day.

### **Line Extension Policy revisions posted**

LPEA has updated its Line Extension Policy, and public comment is currently being taken. Review the policy at [www.lpea.coop](http://www.lpea.coop).

### **How are we doing?**

Want to send a comment to LPEA? The cooperative offers a variety of ways to stay in touch. Click on the Contact Us at [www.lpea.coop](http://www.lpea.coop), or send an email directly to [contact-lpea@lpea.coop](mailto:contact-lpea@lpea.coop).



@LaPlataElectric

# Team Energy Audacity to roll

Domi Frideger and Dylan Kroes are in the final stretch to complete their solar car and get it to Texas by July 13. The two, christened Team Energy Audacity, have been working in a cleaned out storage room at LPEA’s Durango facility.



It all started as part of their Animas High School senior project and their interest in alternative energy. While seeking materials, they learned of the Solar Car Challenge, and quickly signed up to enter their car, “Solis,” into the race that attracts inventive students from throughout the country.

Frideger and Kroes will drive the staged race north from Fort Worth, Tex., to the finish line in Minneapolis, Minn. – nearly 775 miles – “fueled” by a four-panel solar, 1,300 watt system. While they anticipate the vehicle could reach 70 mph, to extend their “power” they expect to cruise at around 30-35 mph. They will take turns driving, with stints of about two-three hours per day.

“I am thrilled to see the perseverance Domi and Dylan have shown to solve this complex engineering project,” says Dan Harms, LPEA manager of rates, technology and energy policy. “Their discoveries will lead them down a path towards solving a number of today’s energy and efficiency challenges.”

Follow Team Audacity’s blog and help with final fundraising at <http://teamaudacity.weebly.com>. LPEA is a supportive Platinum sponsor.



*From the President...*

# Your cooperative striving to fulfill its mission

BY DAVIN MONTOYA | LPEA BOARD PRESIDENT | DMONTOYA@LPEA.COOP

Results of a recent survey indicate that you, our members, value affordable and reliable power as the top priorities. As directors, we have a responsibility to serve all our members collectively and fairly. In today's world, electricity is not a luxury, but a necessity, and it is the board's job to keep it affordable. We must also make decisions that keep the co-op healthy. La Plata Electric, even though it's a cooperative, must be run like a business. It must make enough money to pay expenses.

We understand that many of our members are low income or on fixed income. Every dollar added to their bill is significant to them. LPEA has programs to help our members use less electricity, thus help lower their bills. These efficiency programs, however, result in LPEA selling less electricity (essentially our only source of revenue). LPEA has the same overhead with less revenue,

but we feel the efficiency programs are the right thing to do to help our members in need.

Some members have the misconception that LPEA produces electricity. Remember, LPEA is a distribution co-op, which means LPEA purchases all the electricity needed by our members and distributes it on our grid. LPEA has a contract with Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association (an electricity generation cooperative) to purchase at least 95 percent of the power that you're telling us you need. This is part of the "reliability" component. With guarantees in place, Tri-State can build or purchase what is forecast (including from renewable resources) at the most favorable rate and deliver it to us.

Many LPEA members have invested in renewable energy for their own use – such as roof-top solar. They don't generally purchase electricity from LPEA anymore, but they do still use LPEA's infrastructure. In addition to cutting LPEA's revenue, these new generation loads push power back onto a system that is designed to deliver electricity, and this has caused new challenges and added

to our engineering expenses, among other physical issues.

Remember, LPEA is a business, and we must cover all costs. The "base charge" has been controversial, but to me it seems only fair that members who use LPEA assets to produce their own electricity should pay their fair share of the infrastructure. LPEA provides electricity to these members when the sun doesn't shine or the wind doesn't blow, and maintains the lines, transformers and other associated equipment for these members to use.

We're in continual discussion about sourcing more local renewable generation, such as biomass, micro hydro, wind, heat recovery – beyond just solar – and utilizing the latest technologies, the latter which the LPEA staff does a great job in keeping up with. But we want to maintain that "affordable and reliable" part of our mission that you said was most important.

I have been referred to as the "old guard," but what that has taught me is that our decisions should be made thoughtfully, fairly and with great care, always with our full membership in mind.

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**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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**Chief Executive Officer:**  
Michael A. Dreyssing

**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](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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

