

# enchantment

The Voice of New Mexico's  
Rural Electric Cooperatives

JEMEZ MOUNTAINS  
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

JULY 2023

## POWERUP!

**JMEC launches infrastructure improvement plan  
for better power quality, fewer outages** Page 5

JMEC will be upgrading or replacing equipment throughout its system over the next several years, like this wooden substation in Abiquiu, built some 60 years ago as a "temporary structure."



Jemez Mountains Electric  
Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



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Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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## JMEC Wins Highest Honor in National Communications Awards

It is amazing what can happen when it absolutely has to happen. And an amazing thing did happen last August when, after a long summer of six Special District Meetings, Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Inc.'s members showed up in enough numbers, and gave enough support, so that updates to the cooperative's bylaws were approved for the first time in nearly 30 years.

The "Return Power to the Members" effort carried out by staff and trustees and the response by members was so extraordinary that it won the highest honor - **Best of Show** - for

a communications campaign among nearly 700 entries submitted to a national competition sponsored by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and the Council of Rural Electric Communicators. Wow!

*"I am extremely proud of all the JMEC staff and trustees who came together in an unprecedented demonstration of dedication to succeed in our campaign that effectively returned voting power to our members," said Michael Hastings, JMEC CEO and general manager. "They took on seemingly dull subjects - meeting quorums and bylaw updates - and worked hard to attract enough members to a series of Special District Meetings last summer that we were able to achieve our goal of updating the first three of our cooperative's outdated bylaws."*

*JMEC's "Return Power to the Members" campaign won national honors.*

### Special District Meetings: RETURN POWER TO THE MEMBERS!



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## Power Up! for Better Power Quality and Fewer Outages

Thanks to the support of Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Inc., members JMEC has launched a four-year (2023 through 2026) work plan that will bring long overdue infrastructure improvements to its electric system.

# POWER UP!

Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Infrastructure Investment for Better Electric Service

“The ability to put this work plan into effect was very dependent on our members supporting the rate increase approved by the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission last December,” said Dennis Astley, professional engineer and JMEC assistant general manager. “Absent approval of the increase, JMEC would have had to do a number of projects on an emergency basis, which is not time or cost efficient, while other necessary upgrades would just continue to wait.”

The approved rates resulted in an overall system increase – the first in more than 10 years – of 9.33 percent. JMEC rates continue to be the third lowest among the 13 electric cooperatives served by Tri-State Generation & Transmission.

“With the new rates and a well thought out work plan, we are able to be efficient in making critical reliability improvements of the JMEC electric system,” Astley added.

The long list of work plan improvements were prioritized based on factors such as aging, physical deterioration, safety,

reliability, quality of electric service, storm-related damage and compliance with the National Electric Safety Code.

“The best practice is, typically, to fix whatever is causing the most serious problem(s) first,” said Astley. “About half the work in this plan is backlogged from prior years. The pandemic and other considerations prevented all but construction to new homes from being done from a previous five-year plan.”

Entrust Solutions Group (ESG Engineering) out of Fort Collins, Colorado, completed a thorough engineering analysis of JMEC’s entire electric system – nearly 4,000 miles of distribution line over almost 12,000 square miles – and presented its findings and recommendations in April 2023.

Some of the improvements included in the four-year work plan include:

- Rebuilding, upgrading more than 150 miles of line.
- Replacing three aged-out substations (Abiquiu, Española, Lybrook – on NN).
- Installing more than 1,000 new transformers.
- Replacing more than 30,000 meters.
- Replacing 800 poles.



Broken insulator likely damaged by a lightning strike.

Story continues on page 28.



JMEC crew members Pat Archuleta, left, and Walter Bustos work on replacing a pole that was broken after a lower hanging wire was caught by a vehicle.

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### Questions or assistance?

Call 1-888-969-7956 or send an email to [info@nmelectric.coop](mailto:info@nmelectric.coop).



## Employee to Trustee, Mrs. Dolores G. McCoy



Born and raised in Cuba, N.M., Dolores G. “Gert” McCoy has dedicated much of her adult life to Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, first as an employee and later as a trustee.

**She started work in the JMEC Cuba office in 1985 and it suited her. “I am a people person and I knew just about everybody,” she said. “I took payments, worked collections, did whatever was needed to take care of members and the co-op. I like taking care of people and that is what our cooperative is all about – taking care of our members.”**

She spent more than 22 years as an employee before retiring. Her career spanned the era when the advent of computers really transformed office work. “When I first started I did a lot in billing and back then we would have to look up a member’s billing status in this huge book,” recalled Mrs. McCoy, “The records in that book could be days behind! We would have to make calls to be sure of the member’s payment status. I would also go to the Española office monthly to do the billing. The headquarters had technology long before we did in Cuba.”

While she experienced a lot of change during her time as an employee there were other changes she wanted to be a part of in the cooperative. Two years after retiring she decided to run for a board of trustees seat. “I campaigned like hell and won that seat,” she

said. That was in 2009 and since then Mrs. McCoy has handily won several other elections. She is now serving her fourth four-year term.

**“The trustees are here for the members,” she said. “We care about our members, we really do. We are working awfully hard to keep improving the quality of our electric service, reduce the outage impacts – both how many members are affected and how long the outage lasts – and to keep the rates down as much as we can.” JMEC continues to have the third lowest rates among the 13 electric cooperatives served by Tri-State Generation & Transmission.**

Mrs. McCoy said she enjoys working with her fellow trustees and appreciates the good leadership of board of trustees chair, Dennis Trujillo, and the results she sees from the work of CEO and general manager Michael Hastings, engineer and assistant general manager Dennis Astley and the good, hard work of all the JMEC staff.

**“I’m just trying to make a difference,” she added. “That is what we are all working to do, make a positive difference for the cooperative and the members we serve.” When she is not working on all things JMEC Mrs. McCoy has many other interests and commitments that keep her very, very busy.**

This year she joined the Cuba Clean Up Committee whose volunteer members go out once a month to clean up the village. Mrs. McCoy said that twice a year she dedicates cleanup of a mile of roadway to her son, who used to work for the department of transportation and who passed away in 2015. She is on the supervisory committee of her local credit union, is very active in her church, manages the family rental properties, spends as much time as possible with her husband, daughter and son and, if she is able, squeezes in a little gardening. She likes to keep things going and growing.

**JMEC ANNUAL MEETING**

**SAVE  
THE  
DATE**

**Sunday, August 20, 2023**



**Employee in the Spotlight: Bobbie Jo Chavez**



**Prior to joining Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Inc., in 2016, Bobbie Jo Chavez had not had an office job, had not worked on a computer and did not know how to use email. “I had been a bank teller, worked in retail and restaurants but I didn’t have a lot of office skills so I was a little afraid to take the position,” she said. “But I was encouraged to go for it. They said I will learn and be a good fit.”**

That must have been the understatement of the year. Starting in a temp position in Cuba, as a general office assistant, Chavez moved into the assistant district office clerk position after a year, was promoted to district office clerk, then she pursued the work order clerk position when it opened and now is senior work order clerk. She did learn and she is an excellent fit!

Now she is leading the charge on work that has become her passion – work orders and all the complexity that comes with them.

“I love taking on these work order projects and seeing them through to the end,” said Chavez. “I like the accuracy required in all the things we track and report. I like being transparent to members in all that we do with and for them, and making it known to our cooperative leadership that we are making progress – closing both old and new work orders.”

Katelyn Duran works with Chavez in the Cuba

office and Jeanelle Anaya works out of the Española office. “We’ve worked hard to come together as a team,” said Chavez, “and because of that, and because of the amazing support leadership gives this department, we have been able to problem solve the challenges unique to each district and explore more efficient ways of doing the work.”

Chavez said she really dove in to learn every aspect of this process. “Every district kicks out tons of new work orders and we get to solve logic problems with each.” That solution-oriented approach includes planning to streamline a process that resists streamlining – managing work orders – so the team sets the cooperative up for success with a system that keeps projects on track.

**“Since I joined JMEC I’ve realized I have capabilities I never knew I had,” she said. “When I first started, my boss at the time would give me a responsibility and I couldn’t believe that he believed I could do. And then I would do it. I have realized I can set goals for myself and achieve them.”**

While JMEC and its members have been the beneficiary of the hard work Chavez puts into herself and her job, she is able to leave work at work when she goes home. She and her husband have three kids, a son, 32, is married with a family of his own, a daughter, 22, has returned to college to become a teacher and a son, 18, is getting ready to graduate and go to college. Looks like she achieved important goals at home, too.



## Power Up! for Better Power Quality and Fewer Outages

*Story continued from page 5.*

**Pole maintenance is never ending. There are, for example, about 22 poles per mile of line so, about 80,000 poles total in JMEC's electric system. Keeping up with replacing those that have rotted, been storm damaged or in other ways are unsafe is a job unto itself. In the infrastructure work plan, it is likely that in rebuilding a line, all the poles on the new line will be replaced.**

"It is a lot of work but, at the end of four years, what our members will have is an electric system that is much stronger and better able to serve them than it was in 2021," said Astley.

How will members notice the change? The plan's aim is for members to experience better power quality and fewer, shorter outages. JMEC will always have to contend, however, with the challenges that come hand in hand with a service territory that is, for the most part, extremely remote and in a harsh desert climate that has frequent severe weather.

One initiative that should support fewer members experiencing outages and if they have outages it would be for shorter durations is installing breakers and fuses along the distribution lines to minimize the number of members impacted by an outage.

"If a substation breaker goes, you can have 400 miles of line over rough, barely accessible terrain to check," said Astley. "It can take hours to find and get to the cause of an outage. By adding fuses and circuit breakers, you reduce the miles of line (and number of members) losing power should there be, for example, a tree-meets-power line incident and, we can find and fix the outage more quickly."



Meter readers Jesus Guzman, (left) and Josh Bakken install one of the more than 30,000 new meters going in throughout JMEC's system in the coming years. The new meters provide more and immediate information about quality of voltage and outages.

Astley said that while some infrastructure work plan projects may require brief service interruptions to members the JMEC crews will be able to do the vast majority of their work with energized lines. Brief interruptions would mainly occur as old wire is replaced with new.

**JMEC is thrilled that this work is underway. The schedule is aggressive and supply chain delays are still a factor (it can take three years between ordering and receiving a new transformer) but neither will get in the way of the cooperative's commitment to system safety and reliability.**



Some areas in JMEC service territory are so remote pole replacements have to be helicoptered in.





The Rio en Medio fire, started some miles from JMEC lines, burned poles from the bottom up so, all that is left holding it together are the lines.

## AMONG THE REASONS FOR JMEC'S INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN FOR EQUIPMENT REPAIR AND REPLACEMENT:

- Deferred maintenance
- Aged-out materials
- Lightning strikes
- Fires
- Tree meets power line
- Critter / raptor meets line
- Vehicle meets pole



Crews reach up to steady a pole lowered by helicopter and place it in a hole prepared for its setting - one of 26 poles replaced as a result of the Rio en Medio fire which started several miles away from JMEC lines.

## JME Foundation Scholarship Recipients!



We are delighted to share with you the recipients of the 2023 Jemez Mountains Electric Foundation scholarships. Eligibility for this year's scholarship award

included students whose parents or guardians are members of JMEC and have lived in the cooperative's service area for at least a year; who were high school seniors set to graduate in 2023; who would enroll as a full-time student in a college, university or technical school; who maintained a 2.5 GPA with no Fs.

We are grateful to Northern New Mexico College which provided a panel who reviewed the applications - which had all the personal identifying information removed - and selected this year's recipients.

Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative has supported the pursuit of higher education among our member families through the Foundation's scholarship funding for more than three decades.

### CONGRATULATIONS TO THESE 2023 RECIPIENTS!

#### Cuba High School

- Clayton Chavez

#### Coronado High School

- Joshua Garcia
- Unica Velasquez

#### Española Valley High School

- Gracie Bird
- Jaydn Martinez
- Unica May
- Letisha Ortiz
- Gabriel Salazar

#### Los Alamos High School

- Chantel Bibeault
- Mia Casados

#### McCurdy Charter School

- Alanah Marquez

#### NM Connections Academy

- Nathaniel Garcia
- Nicolas Garcia



#### Pojoaque High School

- Adam Pacheco
- Maria Analyse Torres
- Adrian Triana

#### St. Michael's High School

- Joshua Sanchez

**\$1,000 Basin Scholarship**  
in collaboration with JMEC  
Unica May, Española Valley High School

**\$1,000 Tri-State G&T**  
in collaboration with JMEC  
Kaitlyn Velarde, Los Alamos High School