

enchantment

The Voice of New Mexico's
Rural Electric Cooperatives

JEMEZ MOUNTAINS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

APRIL 2023



The One Thing

JMEC people talk about what they think is the single most important advancement in electric service since the co-op's founding.

What do you think? Page 5

Photo at right, JMEC GM and CEO Michael Hastings and Assist. GM and professional engineer Dennis Astley recreate the scene captured in the photo at left from the cooperative's early days. Fred Abouselman, left, who was a founder as well as GM and board secretary, with Woody Wood, manager of operations.




Jemez Mountains Electric
Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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Board of Trustees

President, Dennis Trujillo
District 1 - Jemez Springs, Jemez Pueblo, Zia Pueblo, Surrounding areas

Vice President, Manuel Bustos
District 5 - La Mesilla, San Pedro & north up to Alcalde

Secretary, John Ramon Vigil
District 4 - Santa Clara Pueblo north to Medanales including Lyden & La Canova west of the Rio Grande River

Treasurer, Dolores G. McCoy
District 2 - Cuba, surrounding areas in Sandoval, McKinley & San Juan Counties

Asst. Secretary/Treasurer Stanley Crawford, District 5 - Velarde, Dixon & other areas located in Rio Arriba County east of the Rio Grande River

Dennis Gallegos, District 3 - Abiquiu & the Cañones, Coyote, Gallina, Llaves & Lindrith areas

Lucas Cordova, Jr., District 4 - Chili, Chamita & other areas from Santa Clara Pueblo north to Medanales including Lyden & La Canova west of the Rio Grande River

Elias Coriz, District 5 - Chimayo & all other areas in Rio Arriba County east of the Rio Grande River

Marcelina Martinez, District 6 - Santa Cruz & surrounding areas located in Santa Fe County

Bruce Duran, District 6 - Nambe, Pojoaque, surrounding areas located in Santa Fe County

Marissa Maestas-Muller, Trustee-At-Large - represents the entire cooperative area at large

Electric Cooperatives: People Over Profit

Why Rural Electric Cooperatives Exist

Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Inc., came into being 75 years ago because investor-owned utility, Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM), would not extend its service into our communities at that time.

“Then, in 1962, PNM tried to convince member-owners to sell the system,” said John Ramon Vigil, JMEC trustee. “But they only wanted the Española area and had no regard for the rural areas which were sparsely populated. The members overwhelmingly rejected that proposal.”

Investor-owned, for-profit electric utilities have historically refused to extend their service to more rural, remote and impoverished areas because doing so costs them too much money. **This table is telling:**

Measure	Rural Electric Cooperatives	Investor-Owned Utilities
Consumers / members per mile of line	7.4	34
Revenues per mile of line	\$15,000	\$75,500
Percent of the "persistent poverty" counties served	92%	< 8%

Source: NRECA: Quadrennial Energy Review, <https://bit.ly/3ExXDie>; Business & Technology Advisory, <https://bit.ly/3KDINF3>

Practical electrical systems were introduced in the U.S., in the 1880s and by the 1920s, most cities and towns in America received electricity from either investor-owned or municipal utility companies. By 1932, only 10 percent of rural America was electrified and about half of those people had to buy their own country-home power plants.

Source: National Museum of American History, <https://s.si.edu/3m0Lufb>

Now, about 99 percent of the nation's farms have electric service but the work is not done. JMEC is grateful to our members who have stepped up and supported the cooperative throughout our history and to our employees whose hard work and dedication have served as the sturdy backbone of the organization. Thank you.

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Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Over the last 75 years, what would you say is the single most important advancement in electric service?

“Reliability,” said Dennis Trujillo, board of trustees president for Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Inc. This idea was seconded by Lenny Ortiz, JMEC’s vegetation management coordinator. “My answer to that question is the reliability of power to consumers and, the new technology that we use now compared to then.”

Karen Wisdom, JMEC senior manager of contract administration and compliance, was feeling it for modern technology, too.



“Computers have given us the ability for advanced communications with our members,” she said. “We are able to more quickly narrow down outage issues and inform members of the cause and possible duration.”

Wisdom’s dad, Jeffie Lee, was a longtime staff engineer for JMEC and that made outage management a kind of family affair back in the day. “I was answering the outage line when I was 10 years old,” Wisdom said. “We would write down the outage areas, who was calling and go out to dad’s company vehicle to use the two-way radio to call the linemen. We had to use dad’s knowledge of the system to pinpoint the outages. Now we do all that with time-saving technology.” *Story continues on page 28.*

April Celebrates Line Workers

A lot has changed since the introduction of the telegraph in 1840s ushered in the line worker profession. These workers don’t have to shinny up a pole and cling to it with just their legs anymore or dig and set poles by hand. While still difficult and dangerous, the trade’s mechanical advancements, as well as the onset of safety rules and training, have made the work less hazardous.

Still, it remains an incredible effort to restore power when fixing the problem is widespread, requires miles of driving on unimproved or nonexistent roads, the weather is treacherous or unseen animal behavior obscures the



cause. The regular and routine work of maintaining the system, installing new wires and poles, updating equipment and the like is hard enough.

The establishment of apprenticeship programs has gone a long way to leverage the line workers’ experience, develop professional standards and carry best practices forward from one generation to the next. Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative’s own apprenticeship program takes about four years of full-time instruction, training and on-the-job learning to develop the skills necessary to work with electricity, circuits, power lines and other electronic equipment. At completion, graduates have earned the qualification to work as a journeyman line worker.

There are a lot of JMEC workers who are essential to making sure when you flip a switch at your house or plug in an appliance, a light comes on and the appliance operates. In April, however, we celebrate our line workers, the members of our team who look after the more than 4,000 miles of transmission and distribution lines for the largest electric cooperative in New Mexico. **Thank you!**



From Employee to Trustee: Lucas Cordova, Jr.

Raised on a ranch, Lucas Cordova, Jr., was not one for idleness. Though a rancher by trade, helping out an uncle more than 30 years ago who was an electrician sparked an interest in that profession, which led to his work as an inside wireman in Albuquerque.

"I lived in Española and heard there was an opening at Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative so I got started with the co-op in 1989," Cordova said. He worked a few months on the tree trimming crew before joining the first class JMEC hosted of the four-year journeyman lineman apprenticeship.

There was book learning and monthly tests but Cordova said the on-the-job experience was the best way to learn. "We had some really good mentors," he added. "The linemen all were very helpful and none of us got hurt."

Once he became a journeyman lineman, Cordova got a position as a working foreman, running a maintenance crew. "Every day was different, which is one of the things I really liked about the job," he said. "We were the first crew to clear lines if there was an interruption of service and otherwise stayed busy completing work orders or maintaining the line."

Ever the hardworking entrepreneur, Cordova purchased a bucket truck and a crane truck during this time and started doing tree trimming on the side. Naming his business Aspen Tree and Crain Service LLC, eventually the side business got so busy it became

his main business when he left JMEC's employ in 1999. He was still ranching, working with his dad, the senior Lucas Cordova, though his dad is less involved now at age 84.

He was first elected to the JMEC board of trustees in 2007. "My great uncle was a trustee as was my dad's brother so I guess it's in the family genes," Cordova said. **"I saw some of the equipment the linemen were still using and at the time no one else on the board had done line work so, I thought I could make a difference by bringing a different perspective."**

Sometime later Cordova said the father of a lineman came on the board and together they helped educate the other trustees about the need to bring these workers' equipment to current, more safe standards. "We did the work that earned the support of a majority to start an upgrade and take care of our people," he said. "It made a difference."

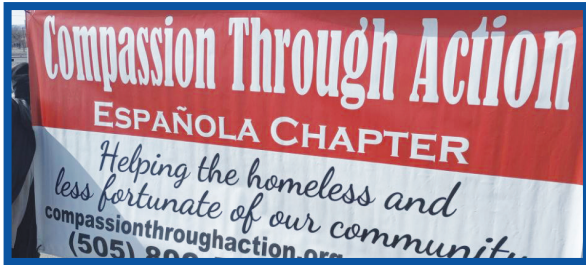
That's how he sees the role of the JMEC trustees – making a positive difference for others, both the employees and members. "We have a good board of trustees today who work well together and with our CEO and general manager," Cordova added. **"The members are our owners and like a former trustee said, we get our report card every four years as to whether we're doing a good job or not. All we need to focus on is doing a good job for them."**



Lucas Cordova, Jr. second from right, above



In Our Community: Compassion Through Action



Started in Los Angeles' skid row more than 15 years ago by Northern New Mexico native Jeff Padilla, Compassion Through Action (CTA) came to Española in 2017 with the initiative of Padilla's cousin Andrew Herrera and Herrera's wife, Nikkie, who shared Padilla's desire to help those experiencing homelessness.

The non-profit regularly collects, assembles and distributes donations of food, hygiene and grooming items, clothing, tents, blankets and more. CTA schedules meet ups in the community where those in need can come pick up sack lunches and any other items provided that they need. Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Inc., was pleased to make a donation to the organization last fall.

"It takes a community to take care of the community," said Padilla. "The issues associated with poverty – substance abuse, crime and homelessness – require everyone to help in any way we can. It is not fair nor just to expect government to fix all of society's ills. The biggest

challenge Compassion Through Action faces is apathy.

"An antidote to this apathy is to become a Compassionator – the name given to CTA volunteers by Pojoaque Elementary School students. Check out the CTA web page <https://compassionthroughaction.org/> for how to donate and volunteer. Financial donations are welcome as are bulk item donations of hygiene supplies and non-perishable food. The organization even has guidelines on how to build a good sack lunch and what to include in a hygiene kit – two things to keep in your car to hand out to any homeless individuals you may encounter.

Another way to help – sign up for Kroger Community Awards. The store will donate a portion of its charitable dollars to CTA based on a percentage of your spend. To learn more about CTA, follow the organization on Facebook or email compassionthroughaction@yahoo.com. They're good people doing good work.



SAFETY TIP: What To Do (and not do) If You Are in a Car Accident with a Power Pole



Credit: safeelectricity.org <https://bit.ly/3S3og3R>

If you are in a car accident with a power pole, do not leave the car until utility professionals tell you it is safe. After a car accident, it may be instinctive to get out if you can. In this case, the safest place is almost always inside the car.

- If the car is in contact with electrical equipment or power line, it could remain energized.

- Stepping outside could be deadly if your body becomes the path to ground for electricity.
- Even if a power line has landed on the ground, there is still the potential for the area near your car to be energized.
- Call 9-1-1 and wait for the utility to arrive on the scene to ensure the line is de-energized.

Stay inside the vehicle unless there's fire or imminent risk of fire. If you must get out because of a fire:

- Jump clear of the vehicle without touching it and the ground at the same time.
- Then hop with feet together so there will not be a voltage difference between your feet, which would give electricity the chance to flow through your body.
- Hop as far away as you can.
- Remember: do not get out unless you have to.

75 Years of Electrical Service

Story continued from page 5.

It can be eye opening to appreciate exactly how long ago 1948 was, the year JMEC incorporated. To help out with that, here are a few things of note from 75 years ago:

1948

- ABC enters network television.
- Harry S Truman wins in surprise upset.
- Velcro is invented.
- Orville Wright, creator with his brother Wilbur of the first airplane, dies.
- The first vinyl LP takes a spin.
- Retailers introduce Cheetos, Reddi-Wip and Tupperware.
- First computer program is written.



Michael Hastings, JMEC CEO and general manager, says a most pivotal advancement occurred in 1949. “The first thing I thought of was when JMEC borrowed the money to acquire the investor-owned utility (IOU) then providing the power needs of the Española

area,” Hastings said. “This was a huge, strategic decision by the cooperative.”

According to a history provided by John Ramon Vigil, JMEC trustee representing District No. 4, the purchase of that IOU, Inland Utility Company, enabled the cooperative’s expansion into the Española Valley. At the time, only 3,500 valley members across about 126 miles of line were using the system. By 1955, the cooperative had nearly doubled in members to 6,000 and there were about 800 miles of line.

While its pioneering beginnings were in the Jemez Springs and Cuba/San Ysidro areas, by 1957 nearly 80

percent of JMEC’s membership was based in the Española area and northern Santa Fe County.

Since those early days, thousands of poles have been set and miles of line strung since then to keep up with the growth in service territory and members. That’s more of what was on Dennis Astley’s mind when asked about the

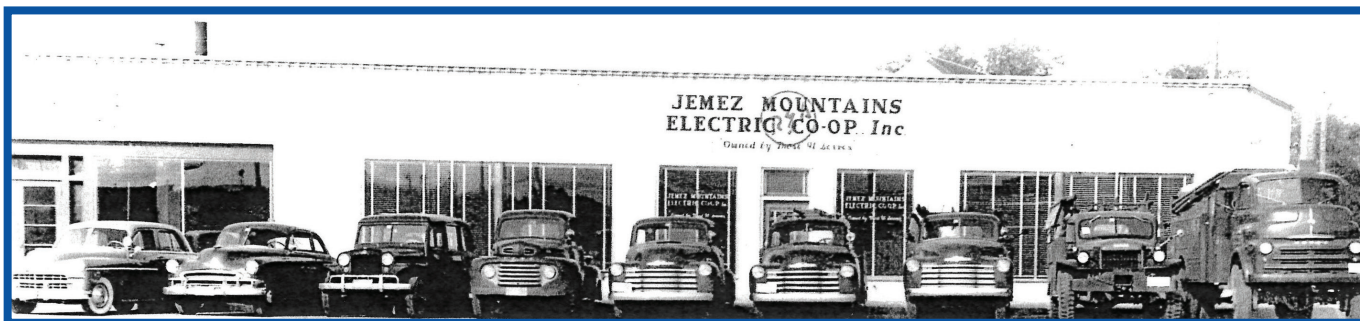


biggest advance in electric service since 1948. He’s JMEC’s assistant general manager and a professional engineer.

“I would say, as a utility employee, the single most important advancement is the digger derrick truck used to set poles,” Astley commented. “In the book, ‘The Next Greatest Thing: Fifty Years of Rural Electrification in America,’ there are pictures of crews digging poles by hand and using pike poles to lift them up to slide into the holes.”

Another book, “The American Lineman,” makes the case for the bucket truck. As reported in Rural Electric Magazine, the book states that not only did the vehicles minimize fall risks but, fiber glass booms provided an additional degree of insulation.¹

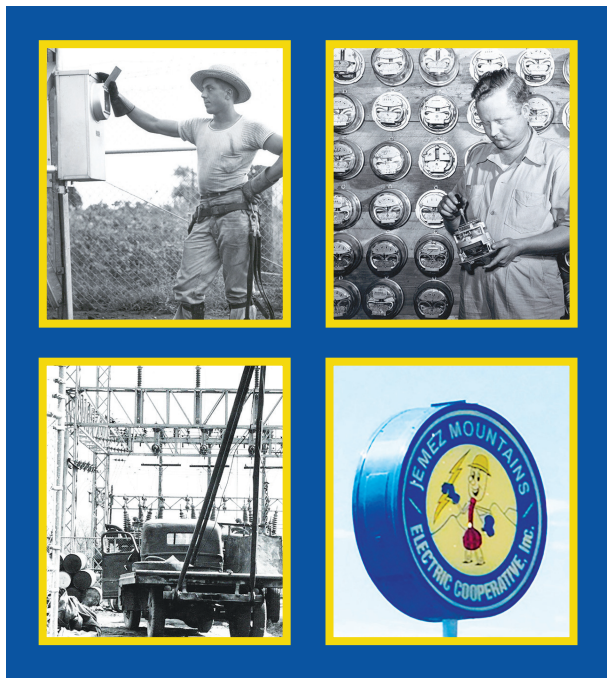
Astley had a thought about the question from a JMEC billing clerk’s point of view. “I think a billing clerk would say, the biggest advance has been the computerized system for calculating and tracking power bills,” he commented. “In the early days, most members read their own meter, calculated their usage themselves and paid based on a paper handout that laid out how much they owed based on the calculated usage.”



A lot can change in 75 years.

And then there are things that stay the same.

	1948	2023
U.S. Population.....	147 million	336 million
Life expectancy.....	67.2 years	79.1 years
Average annual wage.....	\$2,950	\$53,490
First class stamp.....	\$0.03	\$0.63
Gallon of gas.....	\$0.16	\$3.79
Average price of a new car.....	\$1,250	\$49,388
Average price of a new house...	\$7,700	\$281,000
JMEC membership.....	\$5	\$5



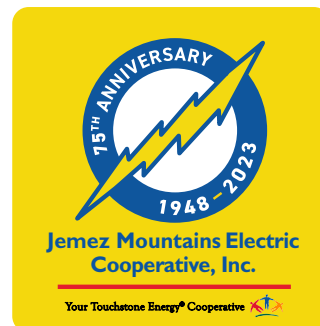
That **1948** \$5 would be more than \$62 in today's dollars but the price of JMEC membership hasn't changed for 75 years. There are other things that have stayed the same as well. JMEC is owned and governed by a membership rather than a for-profit board somewhere in a distant state. It operates as a not-for-profit, cost-of-service cooperative, only charging members what it costs to provide the service and operate the business. The employees are our neighbors. Revenues generated stay local – invested back into the cooperative and our communities.



In recent years, that investment has turned not only to better maintaining the system we have but preparing for the system to come, as with renewable energy and, most recently, high-speed internet.

“The second thing I thought of, as to the most important advancement in electric service, is JMEC’s decision on February 25, 2022, to enter the high-speed internet business,” said CEO and General Manager Michael Hastings. “Like the cooperative’s initiative about 75 years ago to acquire the investor-owned utility, Inland Utility Company, this was another huge, strategic decision.” The impact of bringing quality internet service to JMEC members in 2023 is remarkably similar to the massive change bringing electricity to our rural communities wrought in the 40s. Both are gateways to monumental change – a chance for better living. **As with rural electrification before it, high-speed internet opens doors to economic choice; to better career, education, healthcare and entertainment access; to a higher quality of life.**

That is a hallmark of **JMEC’s 75 years**, making decisions each step of the way that come together to lay the



groundwork for the future and improve quality of life. **While 2023 celebrates a milestone anniversary recognizing all that has come before, the team keeps looking forward.**

1 Rural Electric Magazine, Oct.. 9, 2017 <https://bit.ly/3IB2vFB>