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## A Message From The General Manager/CEO *"Journalistic Drive-By Shooting"*

By Daniel G. Laws

I read recently, with both concern and frustration, an opinion article that was printed in one of our local newspapers about the author's opinion of Rio Grande's service quality. The article was dripping with sarcasm and criticism, but was conspicuously devoid of substantive facts. Inferences about the Cooperative's lack of concern for the membership and their need for reliable electric energy, as well as the ineptness of Cooperative personnel, could be found throughout the article.

Such an article is the journalistic equivalent of a drive by shooting. It is a random act of cowardice that takes aim at and harms unnamed, unseen individuals. The article ignored the very real effort made by Cooperative personnel to keep the lights on under the most difficult of situations. Moreover, it ignored the progress that has been made over the years to improve system reliability. The author did not address the difficulties of providing electric energy in the most rugged and rural service area in the state of Texas, or explain the differences between providing electric energy in downtown Houston, as opposed to West Texas. Finally, the author is not even a member of Rio Grande, nor does his name appear on our billing register. Everyone has the right to criticize and to tell of his or her experience, but before they take aim at individuals, they should, at a minimum, try to discover both sides of the story.

The simple truth is this: From the Board of Directors all the way down through the rank and file, we all take system reliability very seriously. Detailed records are kept of each power outage and its cause. The Board of Directors and operations personnel review outage reports monthly. Problem areas are identified and projects are initiated, in an effort to resolve power quality issues. In 199, the average consumer hours of outage was 15.3, in the year 2000 that number had dropped to 7.5. Rio Grande's electric distribution infrastructure is one of the largest in the nation and its service area is the largest. With 27,000 square miles, our service area is larger than some states. Each year, our service vehicles drive more than 1,000,000 miles in order to cover this vast service area. Much is done that you never see, but the evidence is clear-what we are doing works, as indicated by the reduction in consumer hours of outage.

When an outage call is received, our policy requires that a truck roll within 15 minutes. Our crews set out to restore power and they do not return until the job

is done-period. We do not make judgments about whether the particular load being served can wait until another day for restoration of power. If a member says they need power restored, no matter what time of day or night, we get it back on. If the outage is significant, I am personally notified, no matter how late the time or where I am-including while on vacation.

While on outages, we have had two services trucks wash away in flash flooding and we have had to rescue stranded employees by helicopter due to high water. One employee swam a river at flood stage to restore power to a member on life support, who would not have been reached otherwise. Many have waded in waste deep water for miles, with tools and needed equipment carried on their shoulders, to restore power. They have regularly worked on energized lines with lightening striking all around. These acts of heroism are common among the lineman of Rio Grande. They call it doing their job; **you** can call it,

**"Your Home Team Advantage".**