They say if you don’t like the weather in Texas, just wait 5 minutes and it will change. The same can be said of New Mexico, from what I can tell. Rio Grande’s territory is probably the only area in the nation where you run the air conditioner for part of the day, and the heater for the rest of it.

We were able to get through the first few months of the year without a winter storm of any major consequence, but they caught up with us shortly before Valentine’s Day. A series of winter storms struck some areas particularly hard. Among these were the areas near Queen, NM, and around Van Horn and Fort Stockton.

Ironically, the Fort Stockton area had been scheduled for a planned power interruption to connect a new substation serving the area, but the weather necessitated postponing it a few days. I’m happy to report that it is now up and running and should provide better reliability for consumers in that area.

We are not completely in the clear regarding winter storms, and though I hesitate to mention it for fear of jinxing us, there’s always the possibility of a winter storm as late as April. Depending on the year and the weather patterns that develop, we could even have (heaven forbid) winter and spring storms in the same month.

Though we all dread the storms for what they sometimes do to Rio Grande’s system, they are inevitable, and are something every utility has to deal with at one time or another. I want you to know that we are always as prepared as we can be for the eventuality of things like major ice storms and tornadoes that take out multiple spans of poles and line at a time. Part of our strategic planning includes scenarios for just this kind of weather. We have materials readily available, at locations throughout the service territory, and have contractors on standby, in the event that we need to quickly conduct major repairs in multiple areas, simultaneously. As you can imagine, we cannot prepare for every circumstance, but rest assured, we strive to plan as best as possible.

We realize that when your power is out, it may seem like nobody cares and nobody is coming, but I assure you that we take your situation very seriously. We try to post updates on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram so you will know the status. If we don’t post updates often, it is only because the line crews are busy working on your outage, and may not be able to call in. Remember that cell phones do not work in many of our areas, and the only means of communication is the satellite radio. We do see the words of appreciation many of you post to the crews, and always try to make sure they know you are praying for their safety, as they work to restore your power.

Member Advisory Committees are meeting this month, and always are such a good source of information from other members in their communities. We really appreciate the work they do representing you. They will be looking at the results of the Member Involvement Surveys you submitted, and it is this list they will consider when selecting District Nominating Committees. I can’t stress enough the importance of serving your fellow Co-op members in some capacity, if asked to do so.

By working together -- cooperatively -- you all help to make Rio Grande Electric Cooperative better and stronger. This will help provide not only for the current stability of the Co-op, but will ensure fresh leadership, innovation, and the diversity necessary to see us through this decade and far into the future.
You’ve no doubt heard us talk about “The 7 Cooperative Principles”, but what do they really mean?

As we ramp up for the director election, let’s take a look at how the Cooperative Principles work, with regard to the election process, focusing on the first two principles -- Voluntary & Open Membership and Democratic Member Control.

You’ll see why member participation is so important, and what members have to gain through participating in the process.

Cooperative Principles

1. Open and Voluntary Membership

Membership in a cooperative is open to all persons who can reasonably use its services and stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, regardless of race, religion, gender, or economic circumstances.

“...open to all persons, who can reasonably use its services and stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership...” One might say that the “responsibilities of membership” include a willingness to participate, at some level, in the cooperative process. We certainly understand that some members are limited by distance, medical conditions, etc., but even these members can vote. That’s participation.

As for the rest who are not limited by circumstances, you can “stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership” by service on Member Advisory Committees, District Nominating Committees, and particularly on the Board of Directors.

On last year’s director election ballot, you may have noticed some candidates running unopposed. This is not because the District Nominating Committees were remiss in selecting qualified candidates. Quite the contrary, but in the end, many of the selected candidates withdrew from the race.

You can do your part to fulfill the responsibility of membership by accepting a nomination, if called on by the District Nominating Committee for your area. A full and diverse slate of highly qualified director candidates will help to ensure the viability of the board and the Cooperative.

2. Democratic Member Control

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Elected representatives (directors/trustees) are elected from among the membership and are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote); cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.

“...controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions”. Let’s take a closer look at this. How might you actively participate in setting policies and making decisions? You could be a member of the Board of Directors, District Nominating Committee, or a Member Advisory Com-
"Are you and your fellow Co-op members 100% satisfied with everything RGEC does? Probably not. . ."

mittee. At the very least, if limited by the conditions discussed previously, you can vote. That’s participating in setting policies and making decisions.

Are you and your fellow Co-op members 100% satisfied with everything RGEC does? Probably not. Did you vote in the last election? Statistically speaking, probably not. In the 2019 director election, 85.79% of eligible members did not vote. Though you can vote by mail, or online, using your computer or phone, only slightly over 14 percent of members voted. Speaking about our membership as a whole, that’s not really considered “actively participating in setting policies and making decisions”.

If you choose not to participate in the election, you are not only giving up your right to say who represents you, you are giving up your part in the decision making process to the 14% of the membership which does vote.

“. . .Elected representatives (directors/trustees) are elected from among the membership and are accountable to the membership.”

Co-ops are a prime example of democracy in action -- if members participate. Unlike investor-owned utilities, which are governed by directors who may not even receive service from the utility, Rio Grande’s directors are your fellow member-owners -- your friends and neighbors. Their Co-op service experience is probably pretty similar to yours. They are accessible, and accountable. Every month, their contact information is printed in this RGEC Update.

When the time comes, if you are called upon to run for a seat on the board, are asked to be a Member Advisory Committee member, or a District Nominating Committee member, please “stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership.” When it’s time to cast your ballot in the election, you can “actively participate in setting policies and making decisions”. Remember that the Co-op and its consumer-owners are depending on you.

Read related article, "What’s It Like To Be A Co-op Director", next page, with insight from current members of the RGEC Board of Directors.
“What’s it like to be a Co-op Director?”

Current members of the RGEC Board talk candidly about their personal impressions and experiences, and the demands of being a director.

Rowdy Holmsley
District 6, Sheffield, Texas
First elected 2008, in a Write-in Campaign

To me, the most challenging aspect of being on the board of directors is the responsibility other members have trusted me with, mainly their money! Trying to balance service and expenses we want today and the condition we leave the Co-op in for future generations can be taxing. Management gives us all the information that it can, then the board has to make a choice. I wish I could say all the choices we have made while I have been here have been the correct ones, but I can’t. No one knows the future, and technology is changing at break-neck speed, so what seems best today is not tomorrow.

The amount of time I spend working for Co-op members is 4-6 hours per month. This is not counting two days we spend each month at the board meeting. But, with Tuesday and Wednesday being meeting days, one week of the month is altered.

The biggest challenge I see facing our co-op is in technology. RGEC has one of the best IT programs in the co-op world, but that doesn’t mean we can relax! Technology changes daily, and on the criminal side, as well. Rio Grande can’t protect the grid, but we can protect ourselves. If we ever slow down, we will be behind the curve and it will be hard to catch up. And, who knows at what price.

Some advice I would give a prospective board member: It requires lots of responsibility, but is rewarding and satisfying. My time on this board has made my world bigger, and it has been very educational, but most of all, the people I have come to know as a whole, are wonderful. And, I feel I have made a positive difference in people’s lives.

Priscilla Parsons
District 2, Crystal City, Texas
First elected 2009, Ran By Petition

When I was asked to consider running as a candidate for the RGEC Board of Directors, District 2 position, I honestly knew nothing about electricity or what it took to provide power to my house. Here it is 10 years later and I can honestly say it is one of the most fulfilling positions I have had the honor of holding. I have a great appreciation for the employees. Their loyalty and passion for keeping the lights on is inspirational. I look forward to our monthly director meeting. The diversity of our 13 member board is a benefit when discussing issues affecting the membership. I am proud to say what I originally thought might be an inconvenience is one of the highlights of my life, and I would urge the members to consider running for the director position or volunteering to serve on the Member Advisory Committee in their district.
I wanted to be on the board in order to continue to help with RGEC’s advancement of quality and dependable electrical services at reasonable rates for the vast rural area started by my ranching family decades ago.

I would not consider it difficult to seek a seat on the board. It does require completing the survey with interest in board director, being nominated by the nominating committee after an interview, and completing the requirements needed in order to be placed on the ballot.

The most rewarding part of being a director is learning about the detailed workings of the co-op, meeting people with my same and different interests, and feeling like I am being of service to the co-op representing such a vast, diverse area.

The most challenging aspect the first year was learning all of the acronyms used by the co-op. Also, learning the problems faced by the co-op. I am very conservative, so wanting to maintain service in this sparsely, rugged populated area is difficult and expensive.

I devote approximately five hours a month at home to co-op business. The monthly board package arrives on Friday prior to our meetings commencing on Tuesday evening. I also represent the co-op by receiving phone calls and social contact with members throughout the month.

One of the biggest challenges faced by the co-op is keeping the ownership, control, and benefits in the members best interest. Operating in this type of environment requires new thinking for the members and employees. As the population of the area continues to grow and diversify with pipelines, wind and solar farms, etc. we must continue to help look for opportunities to enhance the co-op in every way. The employees are the most valuable aspect of the co-op, therefore keeping qualified, experienced and dedicated employees is a continuing challenge. Maintaining a balance between quality, reliable service and efficiency at at reasonable rate will remain a challenge always.

Nominating Committees To Be Selected This Month

Member Advisory Committees will be meeting this month, and those in which a director seat will be up for election, will be appointing District Nominating Committees. Director Districts 5, 6, 8, and 9 will each be selecting a director this year. (Refer to Director District map on page 3). Each of the Nominating Committees consists of at least three RGEC members in good standing, who are residents in the respective district for which they are recommending candidates.

Every member who indicated an interest in serving as a director in response to the Member Involvement Survey will be provided with information on the obligation and eligibility requirements of serving on the RGEC Board of Directors, and will be invited to meet with the Nominating Committee handling nominations for their particular district.

Those who are not ultimately selected by the District Nominating Committees, may still seek a place on the ballot by filing by petition.

For a complete list of procedures and requirements, see page 11, Section 4. Nominations for Board of Directors at www.riogrande.coop/Bylaws.pdf.
• RGEC is once again awarding 22 $1,500 scholarships for high school seniors who will be graduating this spring, and whose parents/legal guardians are members of RGEC.

• Previous RGEC scholarship recipients may be eligible for Continuing Education Scholarships.

• Information packets are available through schools, and complete rules and application forms are available at www.riogrande.coop/Scholarships.asp

• Deadline for postmark of entries is APRIL 10, 2020.

Interconnecting smoke alarms, so that when one sounds, they all sound, can be done wirelessly. Some experts believe this is the best way to notify all family members in the home when there’s a fire.

Carbon Monoxide detectors should be installed in a central location outside each bedroom and on every level of the home. Checking and replacing batteries should be done in the same manner, and on the same schedule as smoke alarms. They can also be interconnected. Carbon Monoxide, CO, is an invisible, odorless gas which can kill, so it is important to make sure your family is protected at all times.

When you change the time on your clocks, it is a good time to check smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.

The National Fire Protection Association reports that three out of every five home fire deaths occur in homes with no smoke alarms. Smoke alarms should be tested every month, and batteries replaced at least once a year. If the alarm starts “chirping”, the battery needs replacement immediately.

Prizes - 2 Divisions, (Gr. 1-3, Gr. 4-6)
School Winners in each division receive a certificate. Winning posters sent to RGEC to compete against other school-level winners. One overall winner selected in each division, will receive a $50 Walmart gift card and have their poster design incorporated in the design of book covers RGEC provides to schools for the coming school year.

More info. at www.riogrande.coop. Click the "Extras" tab.
RGEC Participates In Career Days

The Co-op participates in various school career days, and adult job fairs throughout the year. By exposing students to the variety of career opportunities RGEC has available, we not only help to open their eyes to a variety of occupations, but we are also helping to recruit employees of the future. Case in point: We first met Mark Diaz at a career day in Eagle Pass approximately 3 years ago, when he was a very interested high school student. Mark is now a vital part of the RGEC lineman team, having successfully worked his way up from being a Groundman to Lineman Apprentice II.

Here are a few of the students we met in Dell City, December 9, and at Carrizo Springs, February 5. Hopefully, you will meet some of them in a Co-op lineman uniform, or possibly as a customer service representative, engineer, or accountant at a Co-op office in a few years.

Did you know that starting pay for a Groundman (entry level) is $16.50 per hour, in addition to benefits like insurance, retirement, training, and employee discounts?

For more info. on RGEC careers, visit www.riogrande.coop/employment.
Summary of Board Meeting Minutes  
January 15, 2020

A meeting of the Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc. Board of Directors was held at the Fort Stockton Area office in Fort Stockton, Pecos County, Texas at 8:13 a.m., January 15, 2020. The following directors were present for the meeting: Sandra Archuleta, Ellery Aufdengarten, Jamie Ballew, Warren Cude, Tim Edwards, William Foster, Rowdy Holmsley, Jan Metcalf, Margarita Nelson, Priscilla Parsons, Edward Walker, and Cody Whitehead-Burns. Also present for the meeting were Chief Executive Officer Rogelio Andrade, Chief Operating Officer Theresa Quiroz, Chief Human Resources & Diversified Services Officer Martha Gerardo, and Department Specialist Brandi Riojas.

Approved  
- December 18, 2019 Board Minutes, As Presented
- Financial Reports
- CEO Check-In Appraisal
- Audit Engagement Letter With CliftonLarsonAllen, LLP, As Presented
- Board Policy 1.2.6 – Capital Management, As Presented
- Naming Chief Operating Officer Theresa Quiroz, As Designee And Chief Financial Officer Shawn Stanley As Alternate Designee, Pursuant To Board Policy 1.1.3 – Delegation of Authority From The Board of Directors To The Chief Executive Officer

Reviewed  
- Board Policy 1.2.3 Advances, Loans, and Purchases to/by Directors
- Selection of Voting Delegate And Alternate For The CFC 2020 Annual Meeting
- Board Policy 1.2.1 Compensation and Expenses for Directors
- Sale of El Paso Water Line Easement At Cornudas Substation Property
- Safety & Health Program And Safety Trends
- Executive Report
- Audit Committee Report
- CEO and Director Expenses
- December New/Revoked Memberships
- Check Register And Arrears Report

Adjourned  
2:07 PM

Note: The summary above is provided so that members can follow the activities of the board, and is not intended to be exhaustive. Should you wish to know more detail on a particular item or items, please contact the director for your district or the CEO's office.

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Roger Andrade, CEO  
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* Credentialed Cooperative Director