

The Voice of New Mexico's  
Rural Electric Cooperatives

# enchantment

**OTERO COUNTY  
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**

AUGUST 2024

## **Youth Tour in D.C.**

High schoolers from around  
New Mexico spend a week  
immersed in history and  
leadership lessons

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PHOTO BY  
LONNIE TUCKER





A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

## Chief Executive Officer

Mario Romero

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## Emergency and Outages

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## Office Hours

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (M-F)

## Board of Trustees

### President

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### Vice President

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## Board Meeting

The board of trustees meets at 8:30 a.m. the third Friday of the month at the cooperative.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



A sample of the damage to an electric pole from the South Fork Fire in Alto highlights the challenges crews face as they worked to restore power. More than 80 poles were replaced and 160 meters disconnected from the horrific incident.

# South Fork Fire Causes Extensive Damage

The South Fork fire began burning June 17 on the Mescalero Apache Reservation, south of Grindstone Lake. Winds gusted, and plumes of smoke rose higher as the day went on. Shortly after 5 p.m., residents of Ruidoso and Alto were forced to evacuate the beautiful mountain region as the wildfire raged, threatening homes and businesses in its path.

By the following morning, the path of destruction left behind was devastating. More than 1,000 structures were leveled, and blackened tree trunks were all that was left of many beautiful green pines. Communication equipment was destroyed, leaving cellphone and internet services inoperable, and electric service to about 1,200 Otero County Electric Cooperative members was affected.

Crews assessed the damage to determine what repairs were needed to restore electricity to members. Soon after, crews from OCEC, ARC Power Line Construction, Soler Electric, Rogers Tree Service, Roosevelt Electric Cooperative and Penasco Gravel began restoration efforts.

By Sunday, June 23—just a week after the fire began—crews were able to restore electric service to the Alto area. The long hours and hard work, often at the expense of personal comfort, were crucial in achieving this impressive feat. We are deeply grateful for their dedication and sacrifice.





## Pay-By-Phone Number Changes

Effective July 8, the number you call to obtain your balance and make a payment by phone with a card or check was changed. Members should make note of the new number below.

To make a payment by phone or obtain your balance, call 855-940-3957.

# Save a Life

## Avoid distractions while driving

Some temptations are hard to resist, but trying to do too many things at once can be lethal. While driving, we hear an alert from a text or call coming through our phone, and we sometimes feel the need to check it. We know we shouldn't, but we reason we are going to make an exception—just once.

Why do we indulge in behavior we know to be wrong, dangerous and, in some states, illegal?

According to AAA research, most people believe they are better-than-average drivers. After all, we have busy lives and

are accustomed to multitasking. However, research and thousands of deaths every year prove otherwise.

August is Back-to-School Safety Month. As a new school year begins with young drivers and school buses back on the road, now is a good time to remind folks of the dangers of distracted driving.

The reality is that using a phone while driving creates potential for injuries and fatalities. Distractions take a motorist's attention off driving, which can make a driver miss critical events, objects and cues, potentially leading to a crash.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, one in 10 fatal crashes in the United States involves distracted driving,

resulting in more than 3,000 deaths annually. Many of these accidents could be avoided if drivers put down their phones while driving.

Distracted driving is any activity that diverts our attention from the roadway when we're behind the wheel: texting or talking on the phone, and adjusting the radio or navigation system.

Sending or reading one text takes your eyes off the road for an average of five seconds. At 55 mph, that's like driving the length of a football field with your eyes closed.

Here are additional tips we all can follow to keep students safe this year:

- If riding a bike, ride on the right side of the road, with traffic and in a single file. Come to a complete stop before crossing the street, and walk your bike across the street. Remember to always wear a properly fitted helmet and bright clothing.
- If walking, walk on the sidewalk when one is available. When on a street with no sidewalk, walk facing the traffic. Before you cross the street, stop and look left, right and left again to see if cars are coming. Make eye contact with drivers before crossing. Always cross streets at crosswalks or intersections.

At Otero County Electric Cooperative, safety is foremost in everything we do—for our employees and the members of the communities we serve. We routinely remind our crews of the dangers of distracted driving, and we hope you will have similar conversations with your family—especially teenagers who may be new to the roadways and are susceptible to the lure of technology.

Let's work together to keep everyone safe on the roads.

Remember: That text can wait, and waiting just might save a life.