



POWER-GRAM

A Monthly Newsletter for Members of

**OTERO COUNTY ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE, INC.**

Left: Photo by Kelli Pruett

**March
2021**



Cloudcroft
575-682-2521
Alto
575-336-4550
Carrizozo
575-648-2352

www.ocec-inc.com

LOBBY HOURS
8 AM - 4 PM
Monday - Friday

**TO REPORT AN
OUTAGE, CALL**
1-800-548-4660

**FOR BALANCE
INFORMATION
OR TO PAY YOUR
BILL, CALL**
1-844-846-2695



Recent Winter Storm Points to Shortfalls in Energy Availability

The winter storm that hit Valentine's weekend dropped some much-needed moisture in the form of snow throughout a large portion of our service territory. Most members were unaffected by electric outages during the cold spell, except for some in Arabela and North of there on Hwy. 246 in what is commonly referred to by OCEC employees as X-Section.

Prior to the snowfall, heavy fog covered this area leaving behind a thick coating of ice on trees and power lines. While the white blanket of frost may be beautiful to look at (if you are warm and cozy in your home), it puts a substantial strain on conductor and power poles and can cause significant damage to electrical infrastructure. And that is exactly what happened – multiple poles, crossarms, and downed conductor had to be replaced or repaired during the winter weather event in order to restore power to all consumers.

Approximately 150 accounts were affected by outages and the duration of the service interruption was typically less than 24 hours for most members. While we never like our members to be without their electric service for long periods of time, 24 hours paled in comparison to what our neighbors to the east were dealing with during the same period.

The record-breaking winter storm that blasted through Texas left many of its residents without electricity for days as customer demand was at a record high. The increase in demand coupled with reduced wind and solar production, sub-zero temperatures, and limited supply of natural gas, led to a week-long crisis for much of the state.

While none of our membership was directly affected by either substantial increase in power supply costs or lack of generation, thanks to Tri-State Generation & Transmission Association's (Tri-State) current position of having more generation than is needed to meet member needs, this crisis has certainly raised questions about the push for 100% renewable energy and points out some of the problems we could encounter by relying solely on wind and solar for our electric needs. With the winter storm, wind turbines were frozen, solar generation was down due to overcast/snowy conditions, and total generation capacity was reduced as much as 48% while demand hit new winter records. Natural gas generation also had issues. High demand for natural gas to heat homes and businesses, along with natural gas infrastructure not designed and built for the frigid temperatures caused supply shortages. What was available was extremely expensive, which also contributed to record high electricity prices. A similar situation occurred last summer in California, when high demand due to summer heat, paired with California's increasing dependence on non-dispatchable generation, resulted in several days of rolling blackouts and extremely high electricity prices as solar production fell with the sun each evening.

Depending on the source, you will hear one of two narratives, either renewables were at fault or fossil fuels were to blame. Like most things, the situation is much more complex and nuanced than either of these generalized positions. As your cooperative, our number one responsibility to our membership (after safety) is reliability. As our leaders and our society push for more renewable energy at

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Recent Winter Storm Points to Shortfalls...(cont.)

an increasingly rapid pace, while at the same time forcing early closure and proposing elimination of any future fossil fuel generation, we cannot lose sight of reliability. This is why we fought for language in last year's Energy Transition Act (ETA) that in order to meet the ETA's renewable/carbon goals, the transition must be reliable, affordable, and technologically feasible. Unfortunately, with today's technology, a 100% renewable energy grid, absent coal/natural gas/nuclear generation is none of these. We simply cannot escape the facts that we cannot control the wind or sun to meet the constantly changing demand for electricity and we have no currently available method to store energy in the quantity needed to get through the days or weeks long events such as those recently experienced in neighboring states.

As is evident by our local renewable projects and Tri-State's Responsible Energy Plan, which will provide members with 50% renewable energy by 2024, six years prior to the ETA requirement, renewable energy has and will continue to have a significant role in our future. The question is how fast is too fast for this transition without sacrificing reliability to the point of the two major failures seen in California and Texas in recent months. So far, Tri-State has managed to become a national leader in renewable energy, while keeping the lights on when we need it most. As a bonus, their rates have been flat for several years and they are working toward a goal of reducing rates by as much as 8% over the next several years. Through the cooperative business model, via our representative on the Tri-State Board, we will continue to work with them to ensure this does not change as we move forward.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP

Don't keep your refrigerator too cold. The Department of Energy recommends a temperature setting of 35 to 38 degrees for the fresh food compartment and zero degrees for the freezer. Make sure the refrigerator doors are sealed airtight to maximize efficiency.

Source: energy.gov



Three Easy Ways to Save Energy in the Kitchen

- ◆ When possible, cook with smaller countertop appliances.
- ◆ Unplug gadgets and appliances that consume energy even when they're not in use.
- ◆ Only run full loads when using the dishwasher.

Deadline for Scholarship is Fast Approaching

You still have time to apply for the OCEC Education Foundation Scholarship, but don't wait too long!

Deadline to apply is March 15, 2021.

Applications available from your school guidance counselor, at your local OCEC office or online at www.ocec-inc.com.

APPLY TODAY!

March Employment Anniversary

Sherry Crosson—Accountant II (part-time)—45 years
Jessica Gaston—Accountant II—12 years
Chris Hughes—Journeyman Lineman—7 years
Julie Walker-Grinder—Chief Finance Officer—6 years



EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER



John Martin (left) with supervisor, Mike Winrow.

Congratulations to John Martin, named Employee of the Quarter for the 4th Quarter of 2020. John has been a valued employee of OCEC since 1998, working as a meter reader in the Northern Service area.

John was recognized for this honor due to his attention to detail and hazard recognition while in the field. He turns in reports daily that identify hazards so the appropriate action can be taken to mitigate risks to employees and the public, reducing the risk of injury and loss of property.

John's supervisor rewarded him with some new tools and a grill cover for his outstanding job performance.

Thanks for a job well done, John. You are appreciated!