

## Socorro Electric Cooperative Moving Toward Transparency

By Doug May

For some time the members of the Socorro Electric Cooperative have been calling for greater transparency. They wanted to know what was going on and how the money was being spent. On October 3, 2009 SEC District 3 voted that the "Board of Trustees shall voluntarily agree to abide by the New Mexico Open Meetings Act and the Inspection of Public Records Acts." A week later District 5 approved a similar but more comprehensive resolution.

Finally at the annual meeting on Saturday, April 17, 2010 more than 70% of the members voted to approve the following, amending Article VI, Section 1. Regular Meetings:

One regular meeting of the Board of Trustees shall be held monthly at the time and place as the Board shall schedule by resolution. The meeting shall be open to member/owners and representatives of the press with timely notice of the meeting advertise in monthly bill mailings and local newspapers. A section of the meetings agenda shall be reserved for member participation during which member/owners may address the Board without prior approval of the Board.

Except when the Board in its discretion, determines to meet in executive session, all meetings of the Board of Trustees shall be open and all members must be permitted to attend any meetings of the Board of Trustees, unless otherwise provided for by these By-Laws. Time shall be made available for any member to address the board at any of its meetings. The board may remove, or have removed, any person(s) that willfully disrupts a board meeting so that orderly conduct is made impractical.

Following all the voting the Attorney Dennis Francish announced that these resolutions could not take effect until the minutes of this annual meeting were approved at the 2011 annual meeting. Later he had to admit that the resolutions take effect at the time they are passed.

Nineteen members came to the special Trustees' meeting on Friday, April 23, some of them expecting to address the Board. They were not allowed to speak. There was no formal agenda for the meeting. However with permission of the chairman Don Wolberg went through the items passed by the members asking the Trustees to commit to enact them. There was some discussion, but Trustee Wagner was cut off several times before he had finished his comments. I left the meeting wondering what had been accomplished.

Attorney Dennis Francish said that members could address the Board about their concerns but should not be allowed to attend the Board meetings. He said no corporation has open board meetings. That is true. However the Coop is different than a corporation. A corporation is competing with other corporations and must keep their plans secret. Apple is not going to allow Microsoft to know what it is planning for the next five years. Our Coop buys and sells like other businesses, but we are not in competition with others. The nature and spirit of a coop is friends and neighbors working together to provide electrical service. Whether we live on a ranch or in the city we are neighbors, we belong to the same organizations, clubs and churches. Our children go to school together, we do business with each other. We are a community cooperating with one another. We help each other in time of need. We need to renew that spirit. There is no need for secrecy. In fact, it is always better to be open and transparent whenever it is possible.

The members have spoken. The Board meetings will be open, but guests must not disturb the meetings with comments or disturbing conversations among themselves. I would suggest that everyone, including the Trustees, attend a City Council Meeting and especially a Socorro County Commission meeting. We can learn much from them.

The Coop members are moving ahead on this issue and seem determined to see it through to completion in spite of the feet-dragging and obstructions from the majority of trustees.

There are still other issues to address. Redistricting remains as the biggest challenge facing the Coop.