

RELAY

FLORIDA'S ENERGY & ELECTRIC UTILITY MAGAZINE

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HIGH TECH TRANSFORMING KISSIMMEE AND KUA

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ARTICLES

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Blountstown Leans Into Its History and Hospitality
If you take a pre-dawn drive through Blountstown during the work week, you are likely to see a light on at City Hall. It's not that someone forgot to turn out the lights the night before. It's because City Manager and Finance Director Traci S. Hall is already hard at work.
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Beaches Energy Services Director Focuses on His Utility's Most Important Asset: Employees
Because providing electricity requires a wide range of physical assets, such as power stations and transformers, some utility leaders say those physical assets are the utility's most important resources. Others say the customers are a utility's most important asset and should be treated as such: "Where would we be without customers?" But Allen Putnam, director of Beaches Energy Services, goes against both schools of thought and sees his utility's employees as Beaches' most valuable assets. He works to demonstrate his servant-leader philosophy each day as he manages the utility.

FEATURE

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High Tech Transforming Kissimmee and KUA
Kissimmee is a fast-growing community with one foot in the past and the other in the future. Twice a year, rodeo cowboys spend a week competing in time-honored rodeo events at the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the largest rodeo east of the Mississippi River. Kissimmee also is host to NeoCity, a state-of-the-art advanced research facility, where companies and universities collaborate to push the limits of smart sensors, photonics, optics, Artificial Intelligence and other forms of next-generation technology. It all adds up to a vibrant mix of old-style cowboyboying and futuristic technology, with a heaping side dish of world-class theme parks nearby.



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Where in the world is *RELAY*?

In her first trip to Colorado last year, FMEA Marketing & Communications Manager Joanna White remembered to pack her copy of *RELAY* magazine for the journey! As part of the trip, Joanna spent a day hiking and exploring through Rocky Mountain National Park, stopping at several designated overlooks to take pictures. Her favorite part of the trip was seeing her first moose in the wild, along with a herd of elk and several chatty marmots before heading to Estes Park for a well-deserved post-hike meal.

Don't forget to pack a copy for your next trip! Send pictures to relay@flpublicpower.com.

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Florida's Public Power Communities: The Heart of Hometown Excellence



Across the Sunshine State, 33 communities are powered by something more than electricity — they're powered by a shared commitment to community, resilience and local pride. These are Florida's public power communities, where the electric utility isn't just a service provider — it's a partner, a neighbor and a driving force behind local progress. Owned and operated by the very communities they serve, Florida's public power utilities are quietly making life better, brighter and more affordable for millions of Floridians.

From the oak-lined streets and river town of Blountstown to the coastal charm of Jacksonville Beach to the cowboying and high-tech community of Kissimmee, public power utilities form the backbone of many of Florida's most cherished towns and cities. These community-owned utilities prioritize people over profits, ensuring that decisions are made locally and in the best interests of residents — not shareholders. It's this community-first approach that sets public power apart.

Affordable, Reliable and Local

One of the defining strengths of public power is affordability. Because these utilities are not driven by profit, savings are passed directly to customers. Rates are consistently competitive, often lower than those of investor-owned utilities. And with local control comes transparency and accountability — residents know exactly where their money is going.

But value isn't just about cost — it's also about reliability. Florida's public power utilities have a strong track record of keeping the lights on, even in the face of challenges like hurricanes, extreme weather and rapid growth. Their crews are local, deeply familiar

with the community and infrastructure. When a storm hits, public power responds, restoring power swiftly with a dedication that stems from serving their own friends, families and neighborhoods.

This was especially evident after recent hurricanes when public power communities demonstrated exceptional resilience and cooperation. Utilities across the state and country coordinated mutual aid efforts, sending crews to help neighboring cities get back on their feet faster. This spirit of collaboration is a hallmark of the public power model.

Building Stronger Communities

What makes Florida's public power communities truly special is how much they give back. These utilities invest directly in the quality of life of their hometowns — supporting local schools, hosting energy education programs and sponsoring community events. In many cities, utility employees volunteer in local food banks, mentor students and help beautify neighborhoods.

Public power communities offer programs and services to help residents lower their bills

while providing support for parks, festivals and youth sports to help foster vibrant, connected communities.

Local Pride, Lasting Impact

At the heart of every public power community is a deep sense of local pride. People know their utility by name and often by face. Decisions are made in the open at public meetings, not in faraway boardrooms. Problems are solved by people who live in the same neighborhoods, shop at the same stores and attend the same schools as the customers they serve.

Public power is more than just flipping a switch. It's about lighting the way for progress, reliability and local prosperity. It's about putting people first. In Florida, these community-owned utilities are proving that when power stays local, communities thrive.

Florida's public power communities aren't just great because of the electricity they provide — they're great because of the people, purpose and passion behind it. And that's something worth celebrating. ■



Q&A with Lynne Tejeda, *General Manager and Chief Executive Officer, Keys Energy Services*

Lynne Tejeda has been with Keys Energy Services (KEYS) since January 1989, most recently as Assistant General Manager and COO, prior to being appointed as General Manager (GM) and CEO in December 2005. She is a past president of FMEA, the 2017 Member of the Year, and is active in the Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA), serving as vice chairman of the Executive Committee. She currently serves on the American Public Power Association Board of Directors and as chair of the Membership Committee. She was awarded APPA's Harold Kramer-John Preston Personal Service award in 2013 and the James D. Donovan Individual Achievement Award in 2024.

KEYS is the public power utility for the Lower Florida Keys. Headquartered in Key West, Florida, KEYS provides electricity from Key West to the Seven-Mile Bridge and serves nearly 32,000 customers. The City of Key West first purchased the electric utility in 1943.

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Professionally, I love my job and Keys Energy Services. I started my career with KEYS in 1989 and have had the pleasure of serving as general manager since late 2005. Personally, it's all about family. I have a wonderful, supportive husband and my son and daughter-in-law have blessed us with two beautiful grandchildren.

How did you get into the electric utility industry? Tell us about your leadership journey throughout your career in public power at KEYS.

Pure happenstance brought me to the electric utility industry. I randomly heard about an opening at KEYS (then City Electric System) as a public information officer. I applied, started the next week and grew the position from public information officer to communications director. My role with the utility kept expanding, and I eventually took responsibility for strategic planning, which grew my understanding of

all aspects of KEYS. I later became assistant general manager, which led to general manager in December 2005.

You live in a proverbial paradise, where people from all over the world come to fulfill bucket list vacations. What do you enjoy most about island life? How do you navigate the personal and professional challenges of living on an island?

Key West is an amazing place with enviable weather and beautiful scenery. Beyond those obvious benefits of living in paradise, we are still a small town where people know each other and want to help one another. Challenges include our remoteness, our beautiful marine environment — which is also incredibly corrosive, and of course — the annual worry of hurricane season. Most challenges are best handled with considerable preparation and then taking it as it comes.

On social media, KEYS and your utility team members seem to be well loved by your KEYS customers. What is it about your community that makes it so appreciative or grateful for their public power utility?

Our community is pretty tightly knit, with many customers born and raised in Key West (Conchs) and most others who truly appreciate the island. The community sees KEYS employees' commitment to the community, especially in tough times like hurricanes, but also throughout the year in the care they take in their work to the way we volunteer to improve the community. We also are very transparent, so we have a high level of trust, which is important in the municipal world.

You have been in leadership roles with FMEA, FMPA and APPA for many years and also have utility staff serving in leadership roles in public power organizations. Why is serving in public power beyond your utility so important?

KEYS is physically located on an island, but we've never wanted to be on an island figuratively. Our participation in FMEA, FMPA and APPA offers us all huge learning and collaboration opportunities and connections to other municipal utilities. Whether it is power supply, legislative outreach, mutual aid or training, we rely on FMEA, FMPA and APPA in many ways. Being an active member, volunteering on committees, speaking at conferences and taking on leadership roles is a way to show our appreciation for all the many benefits KEYS receives from public power organizations.

What would you say are your greatest accomplishments throughout your career at KEYS?

I'm fortunate to have supportive Board members and talented staff that focus on delivering reliable electricity. We've ensured local generation, upgraded substations, improved transmission and storm hardened distribution. We're well positioned financially with a rate stabilization fund, disaster reserve and mitigation fund and achieving strong marks from rating agencies. We have amazing customer service and community engagement. So, I would say my

greatest accomplishment is working with a tremendous team and encouraging them to do their best on behalf of KEYS,

You have dutifully served Keys Energy Services and the Key West community for more than 35 years. How are you preparing for your next chapter?

I'm not rushing into my next chapter yet. I still find Keys Energy Services very rewarding, and I still have some projects I'd like to see through. When the time comes, I don't plan to jump into something new, rather I'd like to take some time without work pressures to see what feels right. What I most look forward to is more time with family.

Anything else you'd like to add?

When I talk with new employees, I often take the opportunity to say how lucky we are to work in public power. At home, public power is respected and appreciated for the good work we do. At the state and national level, public power has a great community where we're not utilities competing against one another; instead, we actually relish helping each other to excel. ■



Washington Report

by American Public Power Association Communications

House Financial Services Committee Chairman Writes in Support of Municipal Bonds

House Financial Services Committee Chairman French Hill (R-AR) recently wrote a letter to House Ways & Means Committee Chairman Jason Smith (R-MO) to ask him to “fully support the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds — a critical tool that has underpinned American infrastructure and community development for over a century.”

The letter was cosigned by six of the seven Financial Services subcommittee chairmen. The letter came a week after Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE) led 24 House members in sending a letter to Chairman Smith (R-MO) “to collectively support the preservation of tax-exempt municipal bonds in the upcoming legislation.” In addition, House Ways & Means Committee members Rudy Yakym (R-IN) and David Kustoff (R-TN) have said that they will staunchly defend tax-exempt financing during consideration of any tax legislation in the 119th Congress.

Hazard Mitigation and FEMA Loan Interest Legislation Introduced in Senate and House

Sen. James Lankford (R-OK) recently introduced S. 1429, the Promoting Opportunities to Widen Electrical Resilience (POWER) Act, which would help communities recover from disasters and make investments to become more resilient in the future. The bill is the Senate companion to H.R. 164, which was passed by the House by a margin of 419-2 votes in January. A copy of the Senate bill can be at www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/1429?q=%7B%22search%3A%22%3A%22%2B1429%22%7D&r=1&s=7. The Senate bill is

cosponsored by Sens. Margaret Hassan (D-NH), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Andy Kim (D-NJ) and Markwayne Mullin (R-OK).

Trump's Initial Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Calls for Elimination of Funding for LIHEAP

On May 2, President Trump sent Congress an initial proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2026, beginning October 1, that would cut discretionary spending by eight percent, including a 13 percent increase for defense spending and a 17 percent cut for non-defense programs. The budget document is not binding but is indicative of the President's goals. American Public Power Association (APPA)

noted that any such changes would likely have to be enacted as part the annual appropriations process and so could be subject to a filibuster in the Senate.

The budget would eliminate funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). APPA noted it strongly supports LIHEAP and said it will fight vigorously to protect the program throughout the 2026 appropriations process. The budget would also cut funding for the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) by \$491 million — roughly 16 percent. The budget would also reduce non-disaster Federal Emergency Management Agency Grant programs by \$646 million. ■



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Odds and Ends

from Across the State

FMEA Celebrates 2025 Florida Lineman Competition Winners



This March in Ocala, FMEA held its annual Florida Lineman Competition, bringing electric lineworkers from all over the state and outside of Florida together to demonstrate their skill and knowledge in the craft of line work.

The 2025 Overall Journeyman Team Winners Cup was presented to David Hicken, Caleb Macabitas and Jonathan Cody Stokes of JEA. Winning the Overall Apprentice Award was Ryan Kornegay from JEA.

This year, electric utility workers from 18 utilities participated in the 2025 Florida Lineman Competition. This included 156 lineworkers from 15 utilities registered to compete, composed of 77 apprentices and 79 journeyman lineworkers competing on 24 teams, and 64 judges from across the state that scored competitors.

Florida Public Power Utilities Take Top Honors at National Lineworkers Rodeo

Florida public power utilities once again excelled at the American Public Power Association's 2025 Public Power Lineworkers Rodeo, which was held in California in March. Florida competitors took home more than half of the top awards.

JEA's Ryan Kornegay won First Place Overall in the Apprentice Category. Also placing in that category: Second Place – Robert Rivera, Kissimmee Utility Authority; Third Place – Garrett Accomando, Orlando Utilities Commission; and Fifth Place – Dustin Zorn, Lakeland Electric.

JEA's David Hicken, Caleb Macabitas and Cody Stokes took Second Place Overall in the Journeyman Category.

Congratulations as well to Noah Sapp (JEA), Hunter Thomas (JEA), James Hutchison (Beaches Energy Services), and Austin Franey, Cory Breen, Daniel Kelly and Kevon McKinsey (Alternate) (Kissimmee Utility Authority) for placing in individual event categories.



FMEA Recognizes 2024 Safety Awards Winners

The Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) recognized winners of the FMEA Safety Awards this March at the 2025 Florida Lineman Competition Awards Banquet. Utilities are placed into categories based on their total worker hours and rewarded for the most incident-free records. A total of 17 utilities received a Safety Award in their category, including:

Category A (0-59,999 man-hours):

City of Alachua – Perfect Record
City of Blountstown – Perfect Record
City of Chattahoochee – Perfect Record
City of Green Cove Springs – Perfect Record
City of Mount Dora – Perfect Record
City of Newberry – Perfect Record
City of Williston – Perfect Record
City of Winter Park Electric Utility – Perfect Record

Category B (60,000-199,999 man-hours):

Beaches Energy Services – Perfect Record
New Smyrna Beach Utilities – 2nd place
City of Homestead – 3rd place

Category C (200,000-399,999 man-hours):

Keys Energy Services – Perfect Record
Ocala Electric Utility – 2nd place

Category D (400,000-949,999 man-hours):

City of Tallahassee – 1st place
Kissimmee Utility Authority – 2nd place
Lakeland Electric – 3rd place

Category F (2,500,000-greater man-hours):

OUC – Special Recognition



Florida Public Power Utilities Earn National Reliability Awards, Safety Awards

Three Florida municipal electric utilities have earned designation as a Reliable Public Power Provider® (RP3) from the American Public Power Association (APPA): City of Bartow, Gainesville Regional Utilities and the City of Leesburg. They join 251 public power utilities nationwide that hold the RP3 designation.

The RP3 designation, which lasts for three years, recognizes public power utilities that demonstrate proficiency in four key disciplines: reliability, safety, workforce development, and system hardening and strengthening. Criteria include sound business practices and a utility-wide commitment to safe and reliable delivery of electricity.

In Florida, 10 utilities are recognized with the RP3 designation: City of Bartow, Beaches Energy Services, Fort Pierce Utilities Authority, Gainesville Regional Utilities, Homestead Energy Services, Keys Energy Services, Kissimmee Utility Authority, City of Leesburg, Ocala Electric Utility and City of Tallahassee.

Also, congratulations to the eight Florida public power electric utilities that received a Safety Award of Excellence for safe operating practices in 2024 from the APPA: Gainesville Regional Utilities, City of Homestead, JEA, Keys Energy Services, Kissimmee Utility Authority, New Smyrna Beach Utilities, Ocala Electric Utility and City of Tallahassee. These utilities are positive reflections of Florida public power's commitment to safety amongst peers nationwide.

OUC, AdventHealth & Comcast NBCUniversal Unveil Largest Solar Energy Center in Utility's History

The Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) recently celebrated the grand opening of the largest solar energy center in its history. The 149-megawatt (MW) project, located east of St. Cloud on two separate 600-plus-acre sites, will more than double OUC's existing solar capacity.

The addition of Harmony II and Storey Bend Solar Energy Centers brings the total capacity of OUC's solar energy portfolio to 271.5 MW — producing enough solar energy to power 50,000 typical OUC homes.

On April 10, leaders from OUC, AdventHealth and Comcast NBCUniversal gathered in Osceola County to unveil the Harmony II and Storey Bend Solar Energy Centers. The two entities have signed on as anchor tenants — subscribing to a significant portion of each solar energy center through OUC's SunChoice community solar program. SunChoice enables commercial and residential customers to support solar energy, while offsetting all or part of their electric consumption. Customers can meet their sustainability goals, without installing or maintaining the infrastructure themselves.

AdventHealth will offset 50 percent of their energy consumption in OUC's service territory by subscribing to the Harmony II



Solar Energy Center. Comcast NBCUniversal, parent company of Universal Destinations & Experiences, will purchase and match 45 percent of their existing operational energy consumption at Universal Orlando Resort through their subscription to the Storey Bend Solar Energy Center.

Florida Renewable Partners, a wholly owned subsidiary of NextEra Energy Inc., developed the solar energy centers. OUC has signed a 20-year power purchase agreement to receive the energy generated at Harmony II and Storey Bend.



OUC Recognized as a '2024 Customer Champion' in Annual Study

Florida public power utility Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) has been recognized as a 2024 Customer Champion among U.S. energy providers, reaffirming its reputation as an industry leader, it recently said.

Conducted by Escalent, a leading advisory firm specializing in human behavior and data analytics, the Cogent Syndicated 2024 Utility Trusted Brand and Customer Engagement™ Residential Study surveyed more than 59,000 residential customers of electric, gas and combination utilities across the country.

OUC earned a score of 762, tying for second place out of 44 providers in the Southern region.

Escalent noted that utilities named as “Customer Champions” outperformed the industry across several metrics, demonstrating an ability to build goodwill in the community, clearly communicate improvements, and illustrate their value to customers through secondary offerings and savings opportunities.

JEA Launches Customer Mobile App

JEA has launched a mobile app to provide convenience and improved service for residential and commercial customers. The “My JEA” app allows customers to easily view and pay their JEA bills, view their utility consumption, and report and track electric and water outages from their smartphone. Customers also can request payment assistance, get help from JEA’s Customer Center or make an appointment online to visit the Customer Solutions Center, and update contact information and account profile.

The app also paves the way for future enhancements as JEA technologies and customers’ digital expectations advance. The free app is available on the Apple App Store and Google Play. ■



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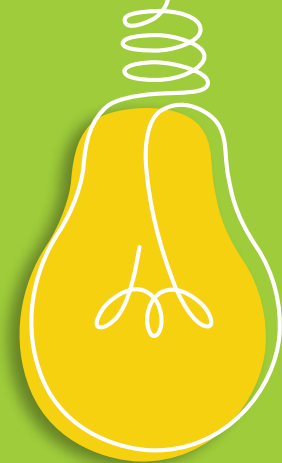
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Who's Who *in the Florida Public Power Community*



Newberry City Commission Names Marlow City Manager

The Newberry City Commission earlier this year named Jordan Marlowe as its next city

manager. Marlow has served as mayor of Newberry since 2017 after having served on the City Commission since 2011. Marlowe has also been a teacher at Newberry High School since 2006. As city manager, Marlowe will be responsible for implementing goals and procedures mandated by the City Commission and directing all city departments and functions.



Fort Meade Picks Drumgo as Interim City Manager

In February, the Fort Meade City Commission appointed Alis Drumgo as interim city manager. Drumgo holds a master's degree in city and regional planning and public policy from Rutgers University,

and a bachelor's degree from Montclair State University in New Jersey. Drumgo, a U.S. Air Force veteran, spent several years with the City of Lakeland, the City of Tampa, and most recently, as a partner with Capital City Consulting.



Williston City Council Selects Beaudet as Next City Manager

In January, the Williston City Council unanimously voted to hire Sue Beaudet as the next city manager. Beaudet joined Williston officially in February after having most recently served as the town manager of Bronson since 2021 and brings with

her 20 years of experience in administration, management and sales. She holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of New Hampshire, as well as a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration.



KUA's Horton Elected Secretary/Treasurer of FRCC

The Florida Reliability Coordinating Council (FRCC) elected Brian Horton, Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA) president and general manager, as secretary/treasurer of the organization's Board of Directors. The FRCC

is comprised of top-level executive members elected within six sectors and directed by a stakeholder Board of Directors. The council's mission is to coordinate a safe, reliable and secure bulk power system in Florida. Horton has been CEO of KUA since April 2019.



Homestead's Quiñones Recognized as 2025 Influential Business Woman

City of Homestead's Director of Homestead Public Services-Energy Barbara Quiñones was recognized as one of *South Florida Business Journal's* 2025 Influential Business Women. This prestigious honor highlights her exceptional leadership, industry innovation and meaningful

contributions to our community. She was officially recognized at the Influential Business Women Awards Luncheon on March 13 and featured in the March 14 edition of *South Florida Business Journal*.

Busby leads business unit strategic planning, IT and security implementation and maintenance, and collaborates closely with leaders across the organization to drive innovation, growth and digital transformation. Under his direction, his team will implement enterprise-wide initiatives that leverage data-driven, customer-tailored technologies to enhance customer engagement. Busby's career spans three decades of driving innovation and creating value in IT leadership roles.

Orlando Alacastro has been selected as vice president of transmission, overseeing the planning, engineering, operations, and maintenance of OUC's electric transmission and substations. Alacastro joined OUC in 2002 as an electrical engineer and has held leadership roles in distribution, system operations and project management. In 2020 he left OUC to assume the role of vice president of project management at Power Grid Engineering. He returned to OUC in 2022 as director of energy services and contract management.

Additionally, Luz Aviles has been appointed vice president of marketing and new products. Aviles will oversee all corporate relations, including communications, media relations, customer education, advertising, marketing and community relations. She will lead the development of new products that generate additional revenue streams. A 30-year utility veteran, Aviles began her OUC career in 1994, most recently as VP of Customer Experience & Sales for the past eight years.

Jenise Osani has been appointed Vice President of Customer Experience & Sales. In this role, Osani will focus on revenue generation and growth while maintaining OUC's commitment to sustainability and exceptional customer service. She joined OUC in 2009 and most recently served as vice president of marketing and new products for five years.



Jaison Busby



Orlando Alacastro



Luz Aviles



Jenise Osani

OUC Names VPs of Digital and Technology, Transmission; Announces Leadership Changes

Jaison Busby was recently named vice president of digital and technology (D&T) for the Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC).



New Smyrna Beach Utilities Welcomes Executive Team Members

New Smyrna Beach Utilities (NSBU) recently announced two new directors to the Executive Leadership Team. Raquel Mercado is the electric operations director

and is responsible for all transmission and distribution, substation and relay, and system operations activities. Mercado has significant experience in generation, transmission, distribution and renewables, as well as resource optimization. Mercado recently worked at investor-owned utility Avangrid, where she held several leadership positions in her 10-year tenure, most recently as vice president of environmental, health and safety.

Julie Adamson is NSBU's new finance director. Adamson's most recent position was director of the office of work program and budget for the Florida Department of Transportation. She has more than 20 years of progressive and diverse experience in managing financial and accounting teams responsible for financial analysis, financial reporting, treasury management, budgeting, general ledger reconciliations and month-end close with more than 13 years of experience in the transportation industry.



Alberto J. 'A.J.' Souto Promoted to JEA Treasurer

JEA has promoted Alberto J. "A.J." Souto to serve as treasurer. He joined JEA more than two years ago and has served as manager of debt capital markets for the past year. Souto will work to ensure the long-term financial viability

of JEA through management of the company's cash and investment portfolio and debt portfolio. Souto has served various municipal finance roles in Duval County for more than 12 years. Before joining JEA, he served as assistant CFO/budget officer for the City of Jacksonville Beach and in various roles at the City of Jacksonville.



FPUA Finance Director Retiring

Fort Pierce Utilities Authority's (FPUA) longtime Chief Financial Officer Barbara Mika retired in May after 19 years with the utility. Mika joined FPUA in 2006 and has served the finance department as utility accountant, assistant controller, and controller prior to her appointment to CFO. Mika

retires with more than 30 years of managerial, accounting and budgeting experience in private, not for profit and government sectors. Thank you for your dedication to the Florida public power community and best wishes in your retirement!



FMEA Welcomes New Member Services Coordinator, Announces Promotions

FMEA welcomed Heather Grant as FMEA's new member services coordinator this April. Grant is an experienced membership and events professional with a strong

background in supporting member engagement. Most recently, she worked with the Florida Osteopathic Medical Association for seven years. Grant is passionate about building relationships and creating meaningful experiences for members and is excited about the opportunity to bring her skills to the Florida public power community.

FMEA also announced two promotions this Spring. A heartfelt congratulations to Elizabeth Bendele on her promotion to FMEA director of member services and to Joanna White to FMEA marketing and communications manager. Both serve FMEA and Florida's public power community to the nth degree! ■



Elizabeth Bendele



Joanna White

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BLOUNTSTOWN

LEANS INTO ITS HISTORY AND HOSPITALITY

by John Egan

If you take a pre-dawn drive through Blountstown during the work week, you are likely to see a light on at City Hall. It's not that someone forgot to turn out the lights the night before. It's because City Manager and Finance Director Traci S. Hall is already hard at work.

Entering Blountstown, drivers will see signs proclaiming the city as "a river town." But that doesn't mean downtown is overrun with bars and nightlife. Quite the opposite: Faith, family and high school football are the most important things in this Panhandle community of 2,300 people, Hall said.

Anglers know Blountstown. The Apalachicola River is nearby, as is the Chipola River. Catfish, bass and redear sunfish, also known as shellcrackers, are plentiful in those waters. There's also good hunting nearby: deer, quail, turkey, doves and wild hogs.

Hikers rave about nearby Torreya State Park, located 20 minutes northeast of Blountstown. Whereas most of Florida is pretty flat, that 13,735-acre park has steep bluffs and large hills where you can break a sweat just by taking a leisurely walk. The park overlooks the Apalachicola River, inviting picnickers to set down a blanket and break out food and drink.

Also featuring river swamps and high pinelands, Torreya has one of the most varied terrains of any park in Florida.

Bikers, walkers, runners and new moms pushing baby strollers abound on the city's Greenway Trail, a 3.3-mile paved and landscaped trail that extends from Sam Atkins Park to the Apalachicola River. It hosts a handful of 5K races during the year, including the annual Blountstown Fire Department Catfish Crawl 5K, which last drew about 200 participants. Whether they ran or walked, at the finish

line participants were greeted by enthusiastic spectators, cheerleaders, music and bottles of cold water.

Blountstown: Where Hospitality and History Intersect

Blountstown is home to about 2,300 people who prefer their small, peaceful and rural community to big cities like Miami, Orlando or Tampa. But should the urge arise, destinations like the Gulf of Mexico — now Gulf of America — and Tallahassee are a manageable hour away.

Faith, family and high school football are some of the most important things in this Panhandle community of 2,300 people, Hall said.

About Traci Hall



During the work week, Blountstown City Manager and Finance Director Traci S. Hall typically rises at 2:30 a.m. to be at the office by 5 a.m. "I get so much more done when the phone isn't ringing and I don't have meetings," she said with a chuckle.

Traci generally shuts off her office lights and heads home around 6 p.m. during the week. Wearing two hats in a small municipal government virtually requires that extra commitment. "I love my job and this town," she said, adding, "It is personal to me." But she draws a hard line around the weekends, unless the city is facing an emergency.

Asked about her hobbies, Hall chuckled and said she had precious little time for hobbies because she was a city leader raising twins — a son and a daughter.

"I traveled all around Florida and the southeast watching my son, Brody, play football in high school and college. A recent graduate of Cumberland University, he's now enrolled in firefighter school. He's a real people person — he takes after his mom in that way. His first-grade teacher said he could sell ice to Eskimos."

She has equally high praise for her daughter, Reagan, who recently graduated from Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee with a degree in marketing. "She's the most driven and hardest working 21-year-old I know. When she sets her mind to something, she doesn't stop until she achieves her goal. She understands that hard work is required in order to achieve most things in life, and that doesn't slow

her down or scare her one bit!" Reagan's last three semesters at FSU consisted of her being a full-time college student, participating in an internship and working more than 30 hours a week each semester.

"I am so proud of both of my kids. I am a proud momma."

Like a lot of working parents, she said she "often got sidetracked by life." But the kids finished college last year, which leaves more time for playing the piano and reading books by her favorite novelist Nicholas Sparks. An empty nester, Traci has no plans to relocate. "Blountstown is home. I am a fifth-generation Calhoun County resident and I love my community."



Unlike much of Florida, which sits in the Eastern Time Zone, the city lies in the Central Time Zone. Each time Hall or another city official schedules a call with an out-of-towner, they make sure to note the city's time zone.

"The people who live here are known for being hospitable, friendly, generous and compassionate," said Hall, a lifetime resident who started working for the city as finance director in 2007 and became city manager in 2014. "They have a heart for helping others and a heart for people in general. We look out for our neighbors and help each other when in need. People here make every effort to make others feel welcome and like family."

It's the kind of small-town community where parents talk to their children's teachers in the produce aisle of the local Piggly Wiggly, at church or on Friday nights, when the local high school football team, the Tigers, battles rivals. Most years, the team wins enough games to go to the playoffs.

"Blountstown is a great place to raise a family," Hall added. She would know, having raised her twins here.

The city rebranded itself as "The Heart of Small Town Florida" last year. One way it delivers on that promise is the annual Panhandle Pioneer Settlement Days, a three-day celebration of local life the way it once was. There are demonstrations of biscuits being cooked on a wood-fired stove, blacksmiths hammering out horse-shoes, knives being made and sharpened, cane sugar being ground into syrup and milk getting churned into butter.

What does owning its own electric utility mean to a small municipality like Blountstown? "It means we can provide

"Our general fund transfers help fund police and fire services, parks, street paving and the general governmental services that our citizens need and deserve... We are not a large city with tourism tax dollars and high property taxes to support us. To place a cap such as this would cripple us in an unimaginable way and in the end, it will be our citizens who suffer the most because we would be forced to raise fees or cut some services we provide."

– Traci S. Hall, Blountstown City Manager and Finance Director

our 1,300 electric customers with reliable service and a quick response time when there is an issue or outage," Hall said.

Pride in their local history also runs deep here. One of the reasons Florida is part of the U.S. is that the city's namesake, Seminole Chief John Blount, was a guide for General Andrew Jackson when he invaded Spanish Florida in 1818. The invasion and subsequent victory led the U.S. to purchase Florida from Spain in 1821. Twenty-four years later, in 1845, Florida became the 27th U.S. state.

Before that, though, Blount was rewarded for his wartime service with a plot of land on the west side of the Apalachicola River measuring four miles by two miles. The reservation was home to a bustling trading post, one of several posts along that vital waterway.

City Faces Economic Challenges

But being a working-class small town has its drawbacks, Hall acknowledged. Landlocked Blountstown lacks access to

interstate highways and navigable bodies of water or railroads. Blountstown is not an ideal location for those in the logistics business, like warehouses, trucking terminals or intermodal transshipment terminals. Hall said parents would like to see more employers locate in Blountstown so their children can stay local after they finish high school.

Farming and timber used to be significant engines of local economic growth, but those have faded in recent decades. Restaurants and boutique retailers make up most of Blountstown's commercial customer base.

Hall said she is very concerned about a bill, H.B. 1523, that at time of writing was being considered during the 2025 Florida Legislative Session that would have "a huge negative economic impact on the City of Blountstown." The part of the bill that is most concerning would cap general fund transfers on revenues derived from extraterritorial customers to 10 percent. "If the bill as

The Benefits, Electric and Otherwise, of Being a Main Street Community

In addition to being known as a river town, Blountstown also calls itself a “Main Street community.” We asked Hall how that tied into owning its own electric distribution system.

She said Blountstown’s electric utility not only makes sure everyone’s lights stay on, but also supports the community in other ways: donating and installing poles at the high school beach volleyball court; assisting with the lighting at the high school football or baseball fields; and maintaining the lighting fixtures at the county park so Little League baseball games can take place after the sun goes down.

The City of Blountstown was recently recognized with a Building Strong Communities Award from FMEA for its efforts to offer programs and

services that enhance the quality of life of their community.

The electric department, along with other city departments, also participates in Blountstown Elementary School’s Career on Wheels event each year by displaying various city trucks and equipment and showing the kids how they operate.

“As a public power utility, utility employees make every effort to give back to our community whenever possible,” Hall added. “Owning our own electric utility means we can provide our customers with reliable service and a quick response time when there is an issue or outage, and the utility’s employees give back in ways that improve our local quality of life.”



filed passes this year or in any future year, it will be a death sentence for small municipalities," she said, "especially those of us located in economically disadvantaged communities.

"Our general fund transfers help fund police and fire services, parks, street paving and the general governmental services that our citizens need and deserve," Hall continued. "We are not a large city with tourism tax dollars and high property taxes to support us. To place a cap such as this would cripple us in an unimaginable way and in the end, it will be our citizens who suffer the most because we would be forced to raise fees or cut some services we provide."

"If it continues advancing or is reintroduced in future sessions, I hope and pray they add language in the bill that would exempt small, economically disadvantaged cities such as Blountstown."

Blountstown and Hurricane Michael (2018)

The city, which provides electricity, natural gas, water, sewer and solid waste services to its residents, was spared in last year's hurricane season. Its electric distribution system, which serves about 1,300 customers,

was completely destroyed by Hurricane Michael, a Category 5 storm, in October 2018.

Hall, who has been finance director for Blountstown since 2007 and city manager since 2014, recalled that the city benefitted from about 66 mutual aid workers after Michael. They came from across Florida, Alabama and Tennessee.

Hurricane Michael turned out the lights for about 12 days, she recalled. Because of the extent of the damage to the electric system, a growing number of residents have purchased electric generators to guard against a repeat of Michael. "People really don't want to go through that again," she said.

Solar: Small and Big in Blountstown

To be better prepared against extreme weather that could turn out the lights, a handful of residents installed solar panels on their rooftops in the years after Hurricane Michael.

Unfortunately, Hall said some of those residents were sweet-talked into solar by fast-talking door-to-door salespeople who neglected to mention the importance of batteries to store the solar generation for long-duration uses. The cost of batteries typically is nearly the

same as the cost to install the rooftop solar assembly itself, which served to deflate some of the local interest in residential rooftop solar.

Once or twice a year, city officials have to explain to residents considering rooftop solar that, while having solar panels on the roof may reduce their electric bill, it will not eliminate it. Customers still need to pay for their proportional share of monthly charges to cover maintenance of the electric distribution system. And having solar panels on the roof does nothing to lower the cost of the other four services that are shown on the same monthly bill from the city: water, natural gas, solid waste and sewer.

Although the city receives no solar power from the Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA), local landowners have leased hundreds of acres of their land in and around Blountstown to Florida Power & Light so it could construct a series of nearby 74.5-MW solar farms.

"The leasing of land has been a little bit surprising," Hall said, "but if the land is not being used, why not?" New business opportunities help small communities like Blountstown thrive in the heart of small-town Florida. ■

"The people who live here are known for being hospitable, friendly, generous and compassionate. They have a heart for helping others and a heart for people in general. We look out for our neighbors and help each other when in need. People here make every effort to make others feel welcome and like family."

– Traci S. Hall, Blountstown City Manager and Finance Director



**BEACHES ENERGY SERVICES
DIRECTOR FOCUSES ON HIS
UTILITY'S MOST IMPORTANT ASSET:**

EMPLOYEES

by John Egan



Because providing electricity requires a wide range of physical assets, such as power stations and transformers, some utility leaders say those physical assets are the utility's most important resources. Others say the customers are a utility's most important asset and should be treated as such: "Where would we be without customers?" But Allen Putnam, director of Beaches Energy Services, goes against both schools of thought and sees his utility's employees as Beaches' most valuable assets. He works to demonstrate his servant-leader philosophy each day as he manages the utility.

Walk around Beaches Energy Services and you will see an image from the *Florida Times Union* on employee coffee cups and mousepads. In the foreground, a darkened restaurant is without power, a victim of Hurricane Irma in 2017. But across the street businesses and apartments are ablaze with light. For Putnam, it was a great point of pride that Beaches Energy served businesses on

the side of the street that was brightly lit. Putnam shares that image in praise of his employees. "Our employees are highly committed," he said. "They take great pride in what they have achieved and what is possible in the future."

Purpose in People

Serving Beaches' 36,000 electric customers in Jacksonville Beach, Neptune

Beach, Ponte Vedra Beach and Palm Valley "provides a better sense of purpose" compared to working for larger organizations, where there never is enough time to get to know employees on a personal level. He speaks from experience, having worked for a much larger utility prior to arriving at Beaches 10 years ago.

Asked about his management style, Putnam said he sees himself as a servant leader. He shares his philosophy of leadership, which begins, "I believe that leadership is a privilege. It is a privilege that carries with it the responsibility to inspire others, and to direct them to attain the vision and goals of our organization. I believe that the single most important asset of Beaches Energy Services is the staff. As a leader, it is my responsibility to know the staff, support their professional development, take an interest in them as individuals and recognize their achievements."

The Beaches director sees his job as assisting fellow employees by allowing them to grow and by removing obstacles so that they can do their jobs to the best of their abilities. He also wants to make sure that decisions are made at the lowest level of the organization to facilitate employee learning.



Servant Leadership in Action

Putnam practices what he preaches: He is a devotee of “managing by walking around,” preferring visiting System Operations or the meter shop or the offices adjacent to his own corner office. “It’s rare that you learn anything new and important sitting in the director’s office. Walking among the employees is where I get energized by learning what’s on the minds of employees and customers. Their top concerns must be the organization’s top concerns.”

A few years ago, Beaches was having trouble retaining lineworkers. The organization took steps to increase their pay and improve the organization’s culture. Employee commitment rose because employees knew the utility’s leadership had heard them and had their backs. “I feel that the most important job of leadership is to develop commitment and pride throughout all levels of our organization,” said Putnam. “I want every individual in the department to feel proud of what they do, understand how their job contributes to the overall mission of the organization and believe that they too are leaders and can provide leadership to others.”

It takes added time and intentional effort to be a servant leader. That philosophy might not work in larger organizations. But Putnam feels the proof is in the pudding. Under his leadership, Beaches has won four consecutive APPA Reliable Public Power Provider® (RP3) Diamond level awards, even obtaining the maximum score of 100 in 2023.

The RP3 designation recognizes public power utilities that demonstrate proficiency in four key disciplines: reliability, safety, workforce development and system improvement. Criteria include sound business practices and

a utility-wide commitment to safe and reliable delivery of electricity. The award recognizes public power utilities who provide highly reliable and safe electric service.

“We couldn’t be prouder to be honored with this designation,” Putnam said in 2023 on the utility’s fourth RP3 Diamond level award. “This is the culmination of a lot of work from a lot of people who really care about powering our community. But this designation is not a final destination. We are committed to continuing to look for ways to improve our operations and service to our customers.”

Supply Chain Challenges Easing

Most of Beaches’ electric distribution system is underground. Putnam said the past supply chain issues related to underground distribution equipment are largely resolved. “Some of this is due to improved supply chain efficiencies and some is due to our strategy in having a longer lead time to procure certain items. The current supply chain limitations are now related to substation equipment, such as large transformers, relays and breakers.

So far, a kinked supply chain has not affected Beaches’ reliability but has driven up prices for these must-have items, he commented. Distribution transformers that once cost about \$8,000 now cost around \$30,000. “The increased risk to reliability could become a reality if suppliers cannot deliver in the current promised time frames.”

Like other utilities throughout the United States, Beaches had to ask developers to pause construction of new homes and businesses last year, as the utility could not guarantee it would



“I believe that leadership is a privilege. It is a privilege that carries with it the responsibility to inspire others, and to direct them to attain the vision and goals of our organization. I believe that the single most important asset of Beaches Energy Services is the staff. As a leader, it is my responsibility to know the staff, support their professional development, take an interest in them as individuals and recognize their achievements.”

– Allen Putnam,
Director of Beaches
Energy Services

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FLAT
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Source: Beaches Energy Services, www.beachesenergy.com/protect-sea-turtles.

Beaches Key Part of #CleanDarkFlat Campaign

For several years, Beaches has been part of a local coalition working to preserve endangered sea turtles. Some of the areas Beaches serves, including Jacksonville Beach and Neptune Beach, are part of the largest nesting area in the world for the Northwest Atlantic Ocean Loggerhead. In Florida, sea turtle nesting season begins May 1 and runs through October. The turtles, protected under federal and state law, lay their eggs each summer on beaches in Northeastern Florida. But light pollution and artificial light can prevent mother turtles from coming ashore to lay eggs. Light pollution also causes sea turtle hatchlings to become disoriented and wander inland, rather than toward the water, leading to their deaths.

Beaches Energy Services is part of the Beaches Sea Turtle Patrol (BSTP) that supports the sea turtle population through its #CleanDarkFlat campaign, which strives to:

- Keep beaches free of litter and personal items
- Eliminate beach-area night lighting for the safety of hatchlings
- Fill in holes that trap turtles

The utility protects sea turtle nesting by turning off streetlights at beach access points where nests are present and promoting Beaches Sea Turtle Patrol recommendations to its customers. Putnam commented: “We work with the Beaches Sea Turtle Patrol and the City of Jacksonville Beach to spread the word about turtle safety and help enforce the Patrol’s recommendations.”

“Beaches is committed to our partnership with the Beaches Sea Turtle Patrol, and we know that we must continue to educate beachgoers and residents alike to keep our simple message of #CleanDarkFlat in the public,” Putnam told a local Jacksonville television station last year.

The utility further supported the effort in 2023 by installing specialized lighting designed to avoid disorienting sea turtles. These lights, approved by the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC), have been installed throughout Jacksonville Beach.



"I want every individual in the department to feel proud of what they do, understand how their job contributes to the overall mission of the organization and believe that they too are leaders and can provide leadership to others."

– Allen Putnam, Director of Beaches Energy Services



have the transformers, cables and other equipment necessary to provide electric service to newly built areas. But that issue has been resolved and there have been no builder interruptions since late 2024, Putnam said.

One of the silver linings from COVID-19's dark cloud was that it required employees across the organization to reimagine how they could do their jobs. The procurement department had to find new ways to secure needed equipment. Those in customer care worked remotely, with less direct supervision,

requiring them to make more of their own decisions.

Next Generation of Generation

Beaches has no generation of its own; it is a member and full-requirements customer of the Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA). Putnam sits on an FMPA committee focused on determining the agency's next source of electric generation. For a state that generates about 75 percent of its electricity from natural gas, the concern is high. Gas prices have had periods of extreme volatility, such as in 2022, after

Russia's invasion of Ukraine upended global energy markets.

One option — solar photovoltaic — has gradually been taken off the table as developers have canceled utility-scale projects in a rush to serve the faster-growing data center and artificial intelligence (AI) industry, who are willing to pay a higher price than utilities.

Hydropower is not a viable option in Florida for larger-scale electric generation. That leaves coal and nuclear as potential baseload generation resources.



Coal is out due to the lengthy and costly challenges of building a coal-fired power plant. That leaves nuclear, specifically new nuclear technologies, which are promised to be smaller and less costly than traditional large-scale nuclear plants. “We’re not there yet,” Putnam cautioned, “but barring

some technological breakthrough, it looks like nuclear may be the way FMPA goes.”

Distribution System Upgrades

While Beaches’ service area is experiencing a moderate growth in population of between 1 percent and 1.5 percent, the population growth has not pushed up electric demand because the new homes and businesses are more energy efficient than prior generations of construction. So Beaches is not expected to need new generation for about a decade.

Because Beaches’ electric distribution system is mostly underground, it has not had to invest as much as other overhead utilities in hardening its system in recent years. But it is spending about \$1 million per year to

underground those remaining lines that are above ground.

One big reliability endeavor Beaches wants to undertake is a \$5.2-million project to move, raise and rebuild a substation control house to get it farther away from cliffs that have been eroded. It’s one of the utility’s largest-ever capital projects, but it depends on receiving federal and state grants, which it would partially match.

The Bench Is Deep, so the Future Is Secure

At 59, Putnam is eyeing retirement around 2028, and he’s actively shaping Beaches’ next generation of leaders. His servant leadership approach allows him to nurture talent and observe leadership potential firsthand. He feels there is great bench strength at the utility. ■

“Our employees are highly committed. They take great pride in what they have achieved and what is possible in the future.”

– Allen Putnam, Director of Beaches Energy Services



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HIGH TECH TRANSFORMING **KISSIMMEE AND KUA**

by John Egan

Kissimmee is a fast-growing community with one foot in the past and the other in the future. Twice a year, rodeo cowboys spend a week competing in time-honored rodeo events at the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the largest rodeo east of the Mississippi River. Kissimmee also is host to NeoCity, a state-of-the-art advanced research facility, where companies and universities collaborate to push the limits of smart sensors, photonics, optics, Artificial Intelligence and other forms of next-generation technology. It all adds up to a vibrant mix of old-style cowboying and futuristic technology, with a heaping side dish of world-class theme parks nearby.





Brian Horton, president and general manager of KUA (Kissimmee Utility Authority), which currently serves about 97,000 customers, leads one of the fastest-growing

utilities in one of the fastest-growing counties in the U.S. As he looks out his third-floor window, he can see the community change in real time, as new housing and advanced technology clusters sprout up on land once devoted to agriculture and cattle grazing.

NeoCity, a large campus that incubates and nurtures high-tech innovation, is located about one mile east of KUA's headquarters.

KUA, the sixth largest Florida public power utility by customers, expects its customer base to reach 100,000 sometime this year. The customer base has grown about 3.5 percent per year for the last five years. That's about four times the historic growth rate of utilities — before data centers equipped with artificial intelligence (AI) began popping up across the U.S. like mushrooms after a summer shower.

"Our customer base has grown as a direct result of population growth," said Horton, who has been KUA's president and GM/CEO

since 2019. "As one of the fastest-growing counties in Florida, the region is experiencing significant growth due in large part to economic opportunities in Central Florida and available developable land within Osceola County."

Horton, a 10-year resident of Kissimmee, is representative of the city's population growth, having moved here from Tallahassee, where he spent 14 years at that city's electric utility.

As an organization, KUA is turning 40 years old this year, though Kissimmee first established its own municipally owned electric utility in 1901.

The KUA chief said Kissimmee has a lot to offer: "Whether you're enjoying the vibrant festivals at Kissimmee Lakefront Park, strolling through the quaint shops and restaurants in historic downtown Kissimmee, or taking in the timeless tradition of the rodeo, Kissimmee has its own unique identity that attracts tourists from across the globe due to the city's convenient proximity to Disney and other attractions."

Local Economy Changing

For decades, the Kissimmee community has been known for its proximity to Florida's world-famous entertainment complexes

such as Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Orlando Resort and United Parks & Resorts (formerly SeaWorld Entertainment Inc.). Many smaller theme parks and entertainment centers are also located in Central Florida, including FunSpot Kissimmee, which features Florida's only wooden roller coaster that goes upside down. Miniature golf courses abound, as do full-length, world-class golf courses.

For decades, tourism has anchored Central Florida's economy, drawing millions of visitors each year. Hotels large and small, theme parks and food establishments offering every conceivable cuisine have long been the mainstay of KUA's commercial customers.

Horton commented: "The rapid growth that is occurring within the Central Florida area is driving the need for infrastructure upgrades and expansion projects across multiple sectors throughout the region. KUA is in the process of moving forward with several reliability and expansion projects including the addition of our 12th distribution substation to accommodate the growth."

He noted that the Florida Department of Transportation and Osceola County have numerous ongoing road projects to

address the area's critical transportation needs, requiring utility facilities to be relocated in the rights-of-way (ROW). Horton added that these ROW projects are occurring at a time when supply chain constraints and increased costs persist for our industry, making it more challenging to manage and prioritize projects.

High Tech Future Unfolding

Central Florida is no Johnny-come-lately to high tech. The Central Florida Research Park, located in nearby Orlando, was established in 1978 to foster advanced and applied research in various industries, including defense, digital communications and aerospace.

Increasingly, high tech is becoming another driver of the local Kissimmee economy. NeoCity arrived about a decade ago. NeoCity, a 500-acre technology campus located in Kissimmee, is paving the way to an increasingly digitized future. Launched in 2014, NeoCity said it was born from a vision to diversify the local economy beyond tourism and agriculture by attracting high-tech industries and research institutions. NeoCity is serving as a catalyst for high-tech innovation and creation, including jobs and capital investment.

High-tech research and manufacturing customers need extremely high electric reliability to ensure operations are not disrupted by a momentary sag or surge in current. Horton noted that KUA partnered with Osceola County on a federal Economic Development Agency grant, awarded in 2022, to underground two 69kV transmission facilities through NeoCity.

In 2019, KUA constructed a \$20 million substation in NeoCity to accommodate its industrial-size power needs. The utility also partnered with one of the first companies to begin operating in NeoCity, BRIDG, on a federal grant that provided \$1 million in economic development funds to be used toward line extensions on its property. In addition to drawing high-end researchers and manufacturers, NeoCity





provides access to major universities and is adjacent to America's one-of-a-kind spaceport/seaport/airport/rail hub.

One of NeoCity's cornerstone clusters is a semiconductor fabrication facility called Center for Neovation. The type of work being done in NeoCity, its proponents say, will provide the technological foundations of advanced warfighting as well as turbocharging the U.S. economy as AI becomes as important as the internet was in the 1990s.

Hurricanes and KUA System Improvements

KUA and its customers have largely been spared by recent hurricanes. Last year, Hurricane Milton turned out the lights for about 15,000 customers. Horton praised the utility's collective response to that storm: "Our response was remarkable. During the community's time of need, skillful staff members stepped up without hesitation, and the result was a record response time that allowed customers to quickly return to their daily lives."

Within 24 hours, power was restored to nearly 99 percent of those customers. "From logistics to customer service to restoration efforts, our workforce responded with extraordinary speed, skill and expertise," he said.

Two years prior to Milton, in 2022, Hurricane Ian affected KUA. Approximately 15,000 customers lost power during that storm. The utility's staff and 38 mutual aid workers



from Minnesota worked around the clock to minimize the impact of outages on its customers. About 90 percent of customers' services were restored in 12 hours.

Those recent hurricane experiences were a far different story from 2004, when Hurricane Charley made a direct hit on KUA and Kissimmee. KUA said it was the most severe storm to hit Kissimmee in recorded history. It shut down electric service to 100 percent of the homes and businesses served by KUA, about 58,000 customers at that time.

Again, working alongside mutual aid crews sent from across the country, KUA's line crews "worked tirelessly to get the lights back on as quickly as possible," Horton said. Approximately 54 percent of customers had power restored in the first 72 hours. One week after the storm, 85 percent of customers had electricity. Service was restored to all customers within two weeks.

Added Horton: "Since Hurricane Charley, and even since Hurricane Irma in 2017, various system improvements have enhanced service to our customers, in terms of the number of outages they many experience and how long an outage may last."

KUA has an active aged cable replacement program: Each year since 2021, it has replaced about 50,000 feet of underground cable that dates from the 1990s. Horton, who received his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering



from Florida State University, estimated the utility has replaced more than 40 miles of aged underground cable to date as part of efforts to improve the reliability and resiliency of its underground distribution system.

Those improvements have helped shorten the duration of power outages, as measured by KUA's System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI) scores. The duration of customer power outages has declined from 34:03 minutes in 2022 to 31:07 minutes in 2023 to 22:13 minutes in 2024.

KUA's reliability was in the top 25 percent of the utilities in the country, based on the latest data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA).

Last summer, a KUA mutual aid crew completed a seven-day mission providing mutual aid for the City of Tallahassee after three tornadoes caused widespread power outages and extensive damage across Leon County. A few months later, in September, KUA provided mutual aid for Gainesville Regional Utilities in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

Horton commented: "KUA's line crews demonstrated exceptional dedication and service as they provided mutual aid to our fellow Florida public power utilities last year. Their willingness to go above and beyond in service to others exemplifies the heart of public power." ■

It's always been
easier for me to
help others

than to
help myself



As a Veteran, when someone raises their hand for help, you're often one of the first ones to respond. But it's also okay to get help for yourself. Maybe you want or need assistance with employment, stress, finances, mental health or finding the right resources. No matter what it is, you earned it. And there's no better time than right now to ask for it. **Don't wait. Reach out.**



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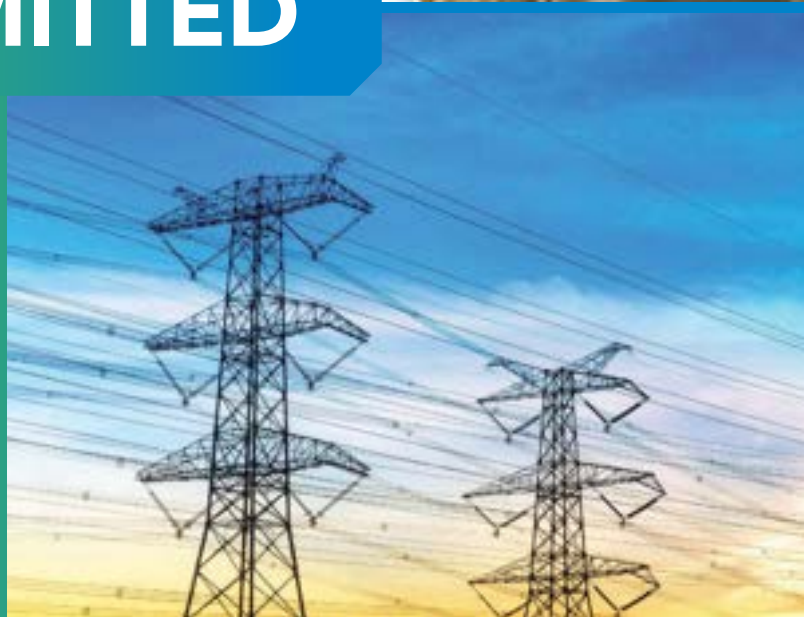
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