

# RELAY



FLORIDA'S ENERGY & ELECTRIC UTILITY MAGAZINE

Volume 55 • Issue 3 • Spring 2023

Feature

**MUTUAL AID  
IT'S NOT A JOB, IT'S A CALLING**  
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**YEAR-ROUND STORM  
PREPARATIONS: LESSONS FROM  
ANCIENT CHINA, PROFESSIONAL  
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Planning increases the probability of success in nearly any endeavor. More than 2,000 years ago, military strategist Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War* that “every battle is won or lost before it is fought.” Carpenters follow a similar rule when it comes to wood: “Measure twice, cut once.” Professional athletes train the whole year for a season that may last only four to six months. Florida public power utilities prepare year-round for hurricanes and other disasters and constantly adapt plans to incorporate best practices and lessons learned.

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Making an electric distribution system more resilient to better withstand hurricanes can be a challenge for all kinds of reasons: design of the system, availability of skilled

labor, supply chain constraints, scheduling the work and weighing its potential impact on customer prices. But FMEA members we interviewed said the reliability investments they made in recent years paid off during the 2022 hurricane season.

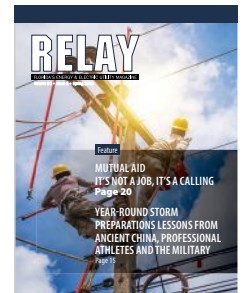
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In FY 2021, the federal government obligated more than \$1.3 trillion in grants. But, as they say, there's no such thing as a free lunch. Spending federal grant dollars requires compliance with award terms and conditions, including, among other things, adherence to the federal procurement standards found in the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for federal awards (commonly referred to as the “Uniform Rules”) at 2 C.F.R. Part 200. Michelle F. Zaltsberg, shareholder with Baker Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz shares five “Dos & Don'ts” to ensure compliance with these standards.

## FEATURE

### 20 **Mutual Aid: It's Not a Job, It's a Calling**

Family. Calling. Brotherhood. Heroes. First Responders. Way of life. Those are some of the words used to describe what drove mutual aid workers from across the United States who traveled to Florida in 2022 to help our members recover from Hurricanes Ian and Nicole. We are grateful to each and every worker!



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## Where in the world is RELAY?

Paul Jakubczak, utility director for Coldwater Board of Public Utilities in Coldwater, Michigan (formerly with Fort Pierce Utilities Authority), remembered to pack a copy of RELAY magazine on a trip to Springfield Castle in Limerick County, Ireland! Don't forget a copy on your next trip! Send pictures to [relay@flpublicpower.com](mailto:relay@flpublicpower.com).

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RELAY is a publication of the Florida Municipal Electric Association.

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RELAY magazine Volume 55, Issue 3





## Swift Response from Public Power Post-Hurricane to Be Applauded

On the afternoon of Wednesday, September 28, Hurricane Ian made landfall along Florida's southwest coast as a powerful Category 4 storm, devastating Lee County with sustained winds around 150 miles per hour. For the next 24 hours, Ian continued to pummel large swaths of the state with extreme winds and heavy rain.

As the slow-moving storm traversed across the Florida peninsula, high winds brought down trees and power lines, and heavy rain brought unprecedented flooding to many areas of the state, including inland areas like Orlando and Kissimmee.

The horrific devastation and destruction left in Ian's wake, particularly in southwest Florida, was — and still is — indescribable.

Several public power communities received significant damage and flooding as Ian tore through their areas. By the time Hurricane Ian exited the state near New Smyrna Beach, the storm had left more than 2.6 million customers in Florida without power, with more than 212,000 of them from Florida's public power communities — about 14 percent of our total customers. All told, 23 of Florida's 33 public power utilities had power outages associated with Hurricane Ian, with 18 using public power mutual aid assistance. All told, FMEA coordinated more than

750 lineworkers from 150 utilities from 23 states to provide Florida communities with mutual aid assistance.

Within 24 hours post-landfall, while Ian was still unleashing its wrath in some areas of the state, public power restored nearly 60 percent of the customers initially experiencing outages; in 48 hours post-landfall, nearly 80 percent were restored; and in 72 hours post landfall, 99 percent of all Florida public power customers had power. The swift response and quick power restoration by public power is to be applauded.

While Hurricane Ian brought many challenges, there could have been more extensive and prolonged outages when compared with previous similar storms. But we saw fewer outages, and shorter periods collectively of being in the dark. This amazing accomplishment is a direct result of storm hardening and investments Florida's public power utilities have made in their systems.

Interestingly, Hurricane Ian's final restoration efforts for public power continued through the middle of Public Power Week. I couldn't be prouder to be a part of such an amazing and dedicated group — from FMEA's 33 member cities to the entire public power community. And while we may not have celebrated Public

Power Week in the traditional sense last year, I am certain what occurred in our communities that week is a true testament of public power.

Unfortunately, Ian was not the only hurricane to make landfall in Florida last year. On November 10, typically when many minds are eased from the threat of hurricanes, Hurricane Nicole made landfall on the southeast coast of Florida, near Fort Pierce, as a Category 1 storm.

While Nicole's impacts weren't nearly as devastating, Florida public power was just as prepared. Nicole left more than 355,000 customers statewide without power, with more than 53,500 of them from Florida public power. With the help of approximately 100 mutual aid lineworkers, Florida public power had power restored to all customers in less than 48 hours.

Each and every one of you should be proud of your work to restore power to your customers — some of you, even dealing with your own power outages at home. From the lineworkers in the field, to the customer service personnel addressing customer needs, to hundreds of other public power employees working behind the scenes to help get power restored, you are all our public power hometown heroes. ■



## Q&A with Jay Stowe *Managing Director & CEO, JEA*

*Jay Stowe was named JEA's managing director and CEO in November 2020, after serving municipal utilities for more than 25 years. Before joining JEA, he served in senior vice president roles for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Prior to TVA, Stowe spent more than a decade at Huntsville (Alabama) Utilities, where he served as vice president of operations and chief operating officer, before becoming president and CEO. He also served two municipal utilities in North Carolina and started his career as a consultant for Black & Veatch.*

In April 2022, Stowe was appointed to serve as one of four representatives of the American Public Power Association to the Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council (ESCC).

JEA, Jacksonville's community-owned, not-for-profit utility, serves more than 505,000 electric customers, making it the largest public power utility in Florida and the eighth largest public power utility in the U.S.

The CEO-led ESCC serves as the principal liaison between the federal government and the electric power industry on efforts to prepare for and respond to national-level disasters or threats to critical infrastructure. The ESCC works to enhance the reliability and resilience of the electricity grid, including physical and cyber security infrastructure and emergency preparedness.

### Q&A

#### ***Tell us a little bit about your background.***

I grew up in a utility family; my father and grandfather ran utility systems in North Carolina, and I have spent my entire life around publicly owned utility systems. Growing up in this environment taught me the value of utilities in a community and the critical services they provide. When the community owns the utility, customers come first.

I graduated from North Carolina State and became a civil engineer. I initially worked as a consultant for Black & Veatch,

then made the switch to the public utility world. I served in two North Carolina municipal utilities, in Newton and Shelby. I then spent 11 years at Huntsville (Alabama) Utilities, where I was vice president of operations, then chief operating officer, and ultimately president and CEO. I later had the opportunity to go to TVA where I was responsible for distributed energy resources — energy efficiency, electrification, solar, rates and contracts — and had a group that had river management, corporate safety, TVA police, supply chain, environmental and R&D. I joined JEA as managing director and CEO in November 2020.

#### ***Tell us about your leadership journey to become the CEO and managing director of JEA.***

My background fit well with the opportunity to work with a great Board and a really accomplished group of leaders at JEA. My initial focus when I joined JEA was to build a team of leaders to deliver on JEA's mission of improving lives and building community. We now have strategic objectives that all of our leaders are working toward: fostering an exceptional work culture, deepening customer and community engagement and planning for the future, and making it easier to do business with JEA.

#### ***Tell us about your role with the ESCC and why it was important for you to take on this leadership position for JEA and public power.***

The American Public Power Association asked me to serve as a representative on the national Electricity Subsector Coordinating

Council (ESCC). I am also a member of FMEA's Large Public Power CEO Group.

As a leader of Florida's largest municipal utility and one of the largest community-owned utilities in the country, it's important for me to be connected with other utility leaders to better understand how others are addressing similar challenges and to share JEA's best practices.

I've also had the chance to serve as CEO lead of the ESCC's supply chain team, an effort by the federal government and electric power sector to understand and mitigate supply chain shortages.

As one of the largest economic engines in northeast Florida, JEA is keenly aware of how national and global issues can deeply impact our community. Equipment shortages and lengthy wait times for supplies driven by supply chain challenges have impacted the ability of JEA — and utilities across the country — to serve the needs of new residential and commercial developments that drive economic growth.

At JEA, we take a proactive approach to meet these ongoing challenges. I wanted to be part of a group that was working toward solutions to this national issue.

***Describe your leadership style. How does this factor into your approach to emergency preparedness and management?***

That is always a hard question and one that others might be better able to answer. I hope my leadership style is to be of service, treating all JEA employees, our customers and stakeholders with courtesy and respect. Since I began at JEA more than two years ago, I have focused on building an unbeatable team. I believe when employees are treated well, they will treat our customers well. When we do our jobs well, everyone else can do their jobs well. I encourage all JEA team members to work through the lenses of safety, respect and integrity. Along with JEA's team members, we work every day to earn trust from our customers.

In terms of emergency preparedness and management, my leadership style focuses on those same values. We have built a leadership team that shares these values.

***When faced with an impending emergency situation, what leadership qualities do you believe are most important in helping your employees prepare? What about your community? Are they the same or different?***

We are fortunate to have so many talented leaders at JEA and a dedicated group of employees. In day-to-day issues and in advance planning for potential emergencies, we seek diverse perspectives that help bring out the best in everyone and the best strategies for our company and for our customers. We promote a culture that allows all JEA team members to feel comfortable sharing their ideas and raising questions when they disagree with an approach or current strategy.

***Describe some of your first impressions when you first became a CEO. Were your expectations different than what you expected?***

When I became managing director and CEO of JEA, the organization had experienced a challenging few years prior to my arrival. What impressed me most was employees' pride in serving our community. Despite some challenging years, team members continued to do the work that needed to be done to provide foundational services for our customers. I am proud to work alongside JEA's 2,000-plus team members every day.

***What does it mean to you to be a public power leader? How do you encourage your team to engage with and cultivate leadership in public power organizations like APPA and FMEA, and in other industry-related organizations?***

As a public power leader, it's an honor to lead teams that work to protect public health and public safety and support economic development in northeast Florida. These are foundational services that improve lives and build community in northeast Florida.

All of JEA's team members are working to support quality of life and economic development in northeast Florida.

When our leaders are involved with industry-related organizations such as FMEA or APPA, they are able to stay abreast of emerging issues and industry trends and are better equipped to lead their teams. We value our partnerships with public power leaders and organizations. ■



# ‘Building Strong Communities’ *Awards Presented to Florida Public Power Utilities*

## ‘Building Strong Communities’ Awards Presented to Florida Public Power Utilities

At its annual Energy Connections Conference and Trade Show in Orlando in early November, the Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) presented 17 Florida public power utilities with “Building Strong Communities” awards. These awards were created to recognize Florida’s community-owned public power utilities for their efforts to offer their local communities extra services and programs that go above and beyond what they normally provide.

Winners were selected for programs and projects that improve the environment, provide community education, collect charitable donations, focus on crime prevention and other special programs, such as lighting ball fields and playgrounds, taking part in community and holiday celebrations, hosting blood drives, recognizing veterans and members of the military, and other programs that strengthen the communities in which they serve.

Receiving a “Building Strong Communities” award were: Beaches Energy Services; City of Blountstown; City of Bushnell; City of Chattahoochee; City of Leesburg; City of Tallahassee; City of Wauchula; City of Winter Park Electric Utility; Fort Pierce Utilities Authority; Gainesville Regional Utilities; Homestead Public Services; JEA; Keys Energy Services; Kissimmee Utility Authority; Lakeland Electric; New Smyrna Beach Utilities; and Ocala Electric Utility.

Not-for-profit public power utilities offer many benefits to the communities and customers they serve because they are locally owned, locally controlled and locally operated.

## Florida Public Power Utilities Prepare for Cyberthreats

Utility companies are attractive targets for hackers and have a high exposure to cyberattacks. To help Florida’s municipal electric utilities understand the threat landscape and resources to prevent cyber incidents, FMEA and the Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA) hosted the inaugural Florida Public Power Cybersecurity Summit in November in Orlando.

The summit provided a forum for more than 120 cybersecurity professionals, utility managers and industry-leading experts to share information; discover tools, grants and opportunities for municipal entities; improve incident response capabilities; exchange best practices; and learn about new trends in cybersecurity.

A highlight of the summit included the CyberStrike workshop, a daylong training for energy sector owners and operators that provides a hands-on, simulated cyberattack, drawing from elements of the 2015 and 2016 cyber incidents in Ukraine. The U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability (DOE-OE), in collaboration with the Electricity Information Sharing and Analysis Center and Idaho National Lab (INL), facilitated the workshop.

The Florida Public Power Cybersecurity Summit also featured a trade show with cybersecurity-related vendors and conference sessions focusing on three different tracks — operational technology, information technology and management.

## Lakeland Electric Celebrates Demolition, Next Chapter in Clean Energy Future

On January 14, selected press, community leaders and project managers alike gathered to witness the first implosion phase of the Lakeland Electric C.D. McIntosh Power Plant project by felling the 260-foot stack and 90-foot Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR) unit.







The demolition is the first of two scheduled to make way for Lakeland's clean energy future, powered by natural gas.

Over the next year, Total Wrecking & Environmental will complete the abatement, remediation, demolition, asset recovery and removal of three massive coal-fired units that have been in operation for more than 40 years.

This project is unprecedented in both scope and complexity, requiring a tremendous amount of resources, specialized crew members and surgical planning to ensure the demolition is performed safely and on time as this project is being performed in an active working power facility.

In March 2023, Lakeland Electric and Total Wrecking & Environmental LLC will mark the second controlled implosion of the coal-fired hung boiler units that represented the nucleus of the station at the McIntosh Power Plant for Lakeland Electric.

### FMEA Announces 2022 'Restoring Communities Award' Winners

FMEA in January announced its 2022 "Restoring Communities Awards," which recognizes public power utilities that either provided or received mutual aid to fellow public power communities in need or provided exemplary service to their own community following significant emergency events during 2022.

Twenty-five Florida public power utilities were honored for their efforts to restore power quickly and safely when called on. This not only included providing mutual aid assistance following Hurricanes Ian and Nicole, but also for other weather and non-weather-related emergencies and outages both in and out of state.

Receiving awards were: City of Bartow; Beaches Energy Services; City of Clewiston; City of Fort Meade; Fort Pierce Utilities Authority; Gainesville Regional Utilities; City of Green Cove Springs; JEA; Keys Energy Services; Kissimmee Utility Authority; Lakeland Electric; City of Lake Worth Beach; City of Leesburg; City of Moore Haven; City of Mount Dora; City of Newberry; New Smyrna Beach Utilities; Ocala Electric Utility; OUC (Orlando Utilities Commission); City of Quincy; City of Starke; City of Tallahassee; City of Wauchula; City of Williston; and City of Winter Park Electric Utility.

In 2022, more than 175 utilities from 23 states, including Florida, took part in mutual aid efforts to restore power safely and efficiently to Florida public power communities, following Hurricanes Ian and Nicole.





Public power utilities prepare year-round for storm season and have made significant investments in storm hardening and strengthening the grid, resulting in improved resiliency and reliability.

## Florida Public Power Utilities Represented at 'Get into Energy Florida' by FEWC

FMEA participated in the recent Florida Energy Workforce Consortium (FEWC) Get into Energy Florida meeting held at Indian River State College (IRSC) alongside Florida public power utilities Lakeland Electric and JEA for a day full of discussion surrounding the future of energy with the new generation of power industry workers. Lakeland Electric Interim Assistant General Manager of Energy Delivery Scott Bishop led a discussion on how to reach these new workers, while Lakeland Electric Director of Training and Workforce Development Tranice McGriff was able to get hands on with the controls for the flow loop control system in the nuclear energy suite at IRSC.

## OUC Is a Solar 'SunRiser' Once Again, Gains Recognition by Sierra Club

For the fourth consecutive year, Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) has been named a SunRiser by the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE).

"SunRisers are the seven utilities exhibiting the highest solar ambition — measured by the increase in watts per customer solar ratio between the base year (2021) and the four-year forecast (2025)," according to SACE's 2022 Solar in the Southeast report. SACE issues the report to evaluate emissions and generation trends of utilities across the Southeast. The report recognized that OUC is on track to increase its solar watts per customer by 1,333 to reach 1,932 watts per customer by 2025, the most of any electric utility in Florida.

By 2025, OUC's solar energy capacity is projected to produce 496 megawatts (MW), enough power for 90,000 typical Florida homes. OUC has committed \$420 million to increasing its solar energy footprint, which will include the opening of two 74.5-MW solar farms in 2024.

In addition, for the second consecutive year, OUC has been recognized in the Sierra Club's 2022 Clean Energy report card for the utility's commitment to reaching 100 percent Net Zero emissions by 2050, with interim goals of 50 percent by 2030 and 75 percent by 2040. OUC is the highest-scoring utility in Florida and one of only two utilities in Florida to earn a "B" rating. A total of 77 utilities were surveyed nationally. In the Sierra Club's inaugural 2021 report, OUC also earned a "B" rating.



In August 2021, OUC's Board of Commissioners formally approved the purchase of the Osceola Generating Station (OGS), a 510-megawatt (MW) simple-cycle natural gas-fired power plant located in Osceola County. When fully operational, by 2025, OGS will be used to mitigate solar production fluctuations to maintain system-wide electric reliability. This enables OUC to retire the Stanton Energy Center's (SEC) Unit 1 by 2025 and convert Unit 2 to natural gas by 2027.

Approved in 2020, OUC's 30-year, clean energy roadmap is part of an electric integrated resource plan (EIRP) that resulted in OUC leadership's recommendation to significantly reduce the use of coal by 2025 and to eliminate it entirely by 2027.

## Clark, Passidomo Reappointed to PSC

Gov. Ron DeSantis has reappointed Gary Clark and Gabriella Passidomo to four-year terms on the Florida Public Service Commission, effective January 2, when the previous terms of Clark and Passidomo were scheduled to expire. The Florida Public Service Commission Nominating Council in August sent the names of six candidates to Gov. DeSantis. Clark, who previously was a deputy secretary at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, has been on the commission since 2017. Passidomo, a former Public Service Commission attorney, was appointed to the commission by Gov. DeSantis in May 2021. ■



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## Public Power Leaders *Named Top Energy Influentials*

Four Florida public power leaders were recently named to the Florida 500 in the Energy Influentials Category. Congratulations to OUC General Manager and CEO Clint Bullock, JEA Managing Director and CEO Jay Stowe, Florida Municipal Power Agency General Manager and CEO Jacob Williams, and FMEA Executive Director Amy Zubaly for the distinction. The fifth annual Florida 500 edition features the most influential business leaders across the state. Join us in congratulating these four leaders for their contributions to public power and recognition by *Florida Trend Magazine*.



### Stowe Represents JEA, Florida Public Power, Before State's Enterprise Florida Board



On December 7, JEA Managing Director and CEO Jay Stowe had the honor to present to the Enterprise Florida Inc. (EFI) Board in St. Augustine regarding JEA's role in northeast Florida's economic development. Across Florida, public power utilities, like JEA, are key partners in helping to support economic development and businesses within the communities they serve. Congratulations, and thank you, to Stowe for representing Florida public power before this elite group of business professionals.

EFI is advancing the forefront of economic development in Florida. As a public-private partnership of business and government leaders, their goal is to promote Florida as a premier business destination and expand the state's economy through private-sector job creation. EFI's Board of Directors voting members represent Florida businesses, trade organizations, educational institutions, governments and economic development organizations.



### **OUC's Aspuru Announces Retirement, Named FMEA Honorary Member**

During its December 8 meeting in Orlando, the FMEA Board of Directors designated Jan Aspuru as an Honorary Member. Aspuru has been Orlando Utilities Commission's (OUC) chief operating officer since 2018, with almost 30 years of service recorded at OUC

in total. Leading the nomination submission was none other than OUC General Manager and CEO Clint Bullock, in which he detailed how Aspuru currently serves as an alternate member on the FMEA Board of Directors and is also a member of the Florida Municipal Power Pool (FMPP) Steering Committee. In addition, Aspuru's nomination exemplified how his dedication to public power extends beyond just Florida. He has been an active member of American Public Power Association (APPA) and Large Public Power Council (LPPC). Most recently, he participated in APPA's Clean Energy Standards Working Group, and LPPC's Operations Executive Working Group and Energy Regulations Task Force.

Aspuru announced his retirement in October 2022 and will continue to serve OUC through April 5, 2023. On behalf of the public power community, FMEA thanks Aspuru for his many years of service and contributions to OUC and Florida public power and sends congratulations on his retirement and Honorary Membership.



### **Cunningham Promoted to General Manager of GRU**

Tony Cunningham was promoted to general manager of Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) on January 19 after holding the interim role for approximately one year. Cunningham, who has worked at GRU for more than 21 years, served on GRU's

leadership team as the utility's water/wastewater officer prior to being appointed interim GM in January 2021.

In his role as interim general manager, Cunningham has focused on building strong relationships and navigating unpredictable workplace challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the upcoming year, he will ensure that GRU continues its long history of providing safe, reliable and essential utility services to the community and oversee numerous projects to further improve GRU's reliability, safety, customer experience and environmental stewardship.

Cunningham, a University of Florida graduate and engineer for 28 years, is focused on continuing to develop a sustainable utility model that balances economics, environment and people.

### **Florida Public Power Represented at FWELF 2022**



Florida public power was well represented at Florida's Women in Energy Leadership Forum (FWELF) 2022 in January. The three-day event included c-suite level keynote speakers and panelists discussing the industry's commitment to a stronger and cleaner energy portfolio, microgrid and advanced technology integration, as well as the impact all of that has on the bottom line. With discussions on new and evolving technology and innovative initiatives, FWELF is committed to highlighting women leaders in this industry.

Florida public power representatives were invited to speak on several panels. FMPA Chief Financial Officer Linda Howard participated as a financial panelist discussing the greening of America and her expectations of America's Green Economy. FMEA Executive Director Amy Zubaly participated in the Path to Net Zero panel, discussing clean energy industry goals and how

Florida public power communities are transitioning to renewables to obtain their net zero goals. FMPA Regulatory Compliance Specialist LaKenya Danyel VanNorman participated on a panel related to workforce talent and how surveys indicate that the up-and-coming workers are seeking purpose-filled jobs, while JEA Chief Human Resource Officer David Emanuel participated on a similar panel that focused on retaining staff through empowerment and professional development. Lakeland Electric Manager of Legislative and Regulatory Relations Cindy Clemmons and Director of Training and Workforce Development Tranice McGriff participated on panels focusing on their utility's Hurricane Ian recovery efforts and ways their utility is building a diverse talent pipeline, respectively.



**OUC Names COO After Nationwide Search**

Attila Miszti has been selected to succeed Jan Aspuru as Orlando Utilities Commission's (OUC) next Chief Operating Officer (COO) after a national search and joined OUC on January 9, 2023.

Miszti will be responsible for managing the utility's electric, water, chilled water, energy services and lighting operations. In concert with OUC's overarching business, strategic and operational plans, Miszti will oversee the execution and management of the utility's operations-specific plans with an emphasis on safety, reliability and operational excellence. Beyond generation, transmission and distribution responsibilities, Miszti will help guide operations through the exploration of new and innovative ideas, combining assets, technologies and ingenuity with an eye toward supporting the region's economic growth and quality of life.

Miszti comes to OUC with 23 years of experience, most recently with Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), the sixth-largest municipal power utility nationally. Miszti was most recently part of SMUD's senior management team for the past 10 years, including reporting directly to the COO, and recently served as the interim COO. He brings experience working in the highly regulated California energy environment. Prior to SMUD, Miszti worked for several multinational companies, including MCI WorldCom and Citigroup.

Miszti earned an MBA from California State University of Sacramento, a B.S. in applied economics from the University of San Francisco, an A.S. in Microsoft systems engineering from MTI

College, and holds several professional certifications. He also serves as an advisory council member for California State University of Sacramento's College of Business.



**FMPA's Howard Named Central Florida's 2023 Women Who Mean Business**

Congratulations to FMPA CFO Linda Howard for being named as one of *Orlando Business Journal's* 2023 Women Who Mean Business. Howard is one of 21 female business leaders in the central Florida area recognized with the honor. These individuals have gone above and

beyond in their respective roles, driving business success, industry growth, workforce development and community advancement. The honorees are executives based in central Florida who were selected due to their business accomplishments, community involvement and personal accomplishments in the past year.



**Marc Gerken Named President/CEO of Hometown Connections Inc. Outlines Plans for 2023**

The Hometown Connections Inc. (HCI) Board of Directors named Marc Gerken president/CEO of HCI effective January 8, 2023. Gerken had served as interim president and CEO since November of 2021. Gerken expressed

his intention to stay on in his capacity as president and CEO through the end of 2024.

Additionally, Mark McCain joined HCI as executive consultant for strategic planning after a 35-year career at Florida Municipal Power Agency. After 25 years at Electricities of North Carolina, Mike Mozingo joined HCI as director of marketing. Both signed on in the summer of 2022.

Gerken stated that going forward, HCI will focus on two areas: consulting services and marketing. HCI offers consulting services in areas such as strategic planning, advisory services, leadership/governance training, business assessments and cyber security assessments.

Hometown Connections is a nonprofit organization committed to the promotion and well-being of community-owned electric utilities in the United States. Hometown Connections works with utility solutions providers who represent the leaders in their respective areas of expertise. FMEA is a marketing affiliate of Hometown Connections. ■



# YEAR-ROUND STORM PREPARATIONS: Lessons from Ancient China, Professional Athletes and the Military

by John Egan

Planning increases the probability of success in nearly any endeavor. More than 2,000 years ago, military strategist Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War*, “Every battle is won or lost before it is fought.” Carpenters follow a similar rule when it comes to wood: “Measure twice, cut once.” Professional athletes train the whole year for a season that may last only four to six months. Florida public power utilities prepare year-round for hurricanes and other disasters and constantly adapt plans to incorporate best practices and lessons learned.

Steve Langley, utility director at the Mount Dora Electric Utility, found out the hard way that cell phones don’t work in the Mount Dora City Hall. He had joined the city’s electric utility as assistant director just before Hurricane Irma in 2017, and during

that storm, he learned he could not take calls on his cell phone while at his office.

“Our response to Irma was very chaotic, very difficult,” Langley said. “But we learned from it. We adopted a clearer command structure at our Emergency Operations Center, started practicing disaster drills, installed new activity logging software and changed the way we communicate with customers.

“Our response to Hurricanes Ian and Nicole was much better than Irma. People performed better because they knew what to expect.”

### **Be Prepared to Flex**

“Be Prepared” is the motto of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. That’s also the

mantra for Florida’s community-owned electric utilities, where the six-month Atlantic hurricane season is preceded by six months of preparation.

Prior to joining Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU), Ray Jordan, currently the electric systems operations manager, had served in the Marines. He has not forgotten the military truism, “No plan for battle survives past the first contact with the enemy.” Storms and priorities can shift quickly, as Ian did last year.

During Hurricane Ian, the biggest challenge for some utilities was flooding, not power outages, even though there were plenty of those, too. Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC), in particular, faced unprecedented flooding in addition

to significant outages. The challenges of flooding are different than those of power restoration, and OUC officials said they are updating their storm restoration manual to include flooding events more comprehensively.

Even when you think you have all the bases covered, Mother Nature often finds a way to throw a curveball. Storm paths can diverge from the models. Winds can be greater than expected — or less. Storms can move more slowly than predicted and sit on an area for days, as was the case with some central Florida communities during Ian.

Langley recalled the time when he worked at another public power utility when Hurricane Charley hit in 2004. While substantially smaller in size than Ian, Charley was also a strong Category 4 storm that followed almost the same track as Ian.

“Everything was closed, including restaurants and hotels, and I had to feed 100 hungry lineworkers,” he said. “I went to our meter readers and asked for help. That day, our lineworkers and mutual aid workers ate sandwiches prepared by our meter readers.”



To make its power-restoration efforts more operationally flexible, Javier Cisneros, utilities director at Fort Pierce Utilities Authority (FPUA), decentralized decision-making in 2022 so that employees one level below him were able to make tactical decisions about restoration.

“We have quality employees, and I didn’t want to make them wait for decisions from me,” Cisneros said. “It’s all about trusting your team. I want to give experienced employees more autonomy. Storms can be a professional development opportunity.”

Utility officials also agree that pre-positioning materials and/or mutual aid crews helps expedite power restoration. When and where they do so depends on the track of the storm. Said one, “Florida is a peninsular state, which means out-of-state crews can only come in from one direction. The last thing we need is for mutual aid crews to be stuck on I-95. Pre-positioning shaved a day or two off our power-restoration times in 2022.”

### **Disaster Drills: Prepare for the Worst, Hope for the Best**

Several utilities, including OUC, Mount Dora and GRU, conduct disaster drills regularly so employees can hone their skills and prepare for the unexpected. OUC, which provides electricity to about 250,000 customers, has been holding these drills for nearly three decades. Roughly 100,000 of its electric customers lost power during Ian.

At OUC, between 100 and 130 employees are involved in the typical disaster drill, estimated Ken Zambito, the utility’s vice president of transmission and interim vice president of digital and technology. Storm response roles from logistics planning to communication strategy and priority restoration efforts are practiced during these disaster drills.

Mount Dora’s Langley instituted annual disaster drills a few years ago when he

joined the utility. He said after-action reports of the drills showed it took a few years for employees to fully understand their responsibilities during hurricane-related power restoration.

But practice makes perfect. “Now, people feel better going into a storm because they’ve practiced and know what they’ll be doing during restoration,” he said.

The utility’s 2022 drill showed how hard it could be to manage the information flow during power restoration, Langley said. So, in time for the 2022 hurricane season, the city’s director of information technology, Jim Faulkner, built a website that enabled people in the Emergency Operations Center to track and manage all storm-related information, such as location of mutual aid crews, receipts for purchases and status of restoration efforts.

“That activity logging website really provided members of the EOC with better situational awareness,” Langley said. “I’m really grateful to Jim for taking this on.”

### **Everyone Has a Role to Play**

While storm restoration efforts naturally focus on lineworkers and mutual aid workers, the utility officials who were interviewed emphasized that every employee has a role to play during storms and power restoration.

“It’s an opportunity to look for hidden employee strengths,” commented LaShun Nale-Stadom, OUC’s incident commander and director of safety, technical training and emergency management.

For example, at OUC, employees in some groups staff employee hotlines 24 hours a day while power is being restored. Employees from other areas provide logistical support for mutual aid workers, arranging for food, lodging and laundry.

GRU sends some employees into the field to be “power line sitters,” said Jordan: These employees are tasked with keeping



the public away from downed lines until they can be accessed by electric crew personnel. This helps free up qualified lineworkers to team up, restoring power while also ensuring public safety by keeping the public away from potential unsafe issues.

Jordan said GRU was fortunate in the 2022 hurricane season. At the peak of Hurricane Ian, only about 16,000 of its estimated 100,000 customers lost power.

When Jordan started at GRU in the late 1990s, the utility's energy delivery group used to handle all aspects of storm planning, including logistics for mutual aid workers. But as the energy delivery group delegated some non-restoration responsibilities to other departments, a better sense of teamwork has developed.

"Other parts of the organization have really come to our aid," he said. "Allowing other work groups to assume some responsibilities allows us to focus on what we do best — restoring power." He said it also helps build better relationships across the utility by playing to other employees' strengths.

### Pre-Storm Field Work

The Atlantic hurricane season typically lasts six months, from June through November. Florida's public power utilities spend the other six months of the year preparing their systems for future storms and processing the information from the most recent storm cycle.

Each year, FMEA members schedule and prioritize tree-trimming and pole replacement. They use infrared cameras to inspect mainline feeders. They schedule major projects, like upgrading poles and wires before the start of hurricane season and send crews into the field to manually inspect, clean and lubricate switches at feeders. For more information on what FMEA members do to harden their systems and improve reliability, see this issue's article, "The Juice Was Worth the Squeeze."

### Communications

Several interviewees stepped up their customer communications in advance of Ian and Nicole. Website alerts, printed and digital hurricane guides, emails, texts, social media posts, TV and radio ads, and reverse 911 outbound messaging were used to inform customers before, during and after the storms about steps customers could take to prepare their homes and businesses, what to do during outages and the dangers posed by downed power lines and flooding.

In an example of a prompt pivot, as Ian dropped an estimated 15 inches of rain on Orlando in two days, OUC created a web page dedicated to informing customers impacted by flooding on the extra steps they would need to take for full restoration.

Prior to the 2022 storm season, significant changes to customer communications were implemented by Fort Pierce and Mount Dora.

Cisneros said Fort Pierce adopted two-way communications and community engagement as part of its storm communications.

Previously, the utility practiced one-way communications where it would push out information to customers but not seek information from its customers via social media, email blasts and text messaging.

"During this past storm season, we spent much more time listening to and engaging with customers than we had in the past," he said, adding that the utility did "significantly better" on its 2022 storm communications.

"Our public-facing communications was my biggest lesson learned," Cisneros continued. "Customer engagement is a necessity, not a luxury. These days, you can't not engage and stay engaged. We did better in 2022 than we did in 2021, and in 2023 I expect we will do even better."

He added that Fort Pierce's improved communications were recognized by customers and the city council.

Mount Dora, which provides electricity to about 6,000 customers, "totally revamped" its customer communications for Ian and Nicole, Langley said, and those efforts also



were recognized by customers and the city council.

Langley said the biggest change for the 2022 storm season was contracting with a vendor, ENCO Systems, to handle customer calls on an overflow basis and send outbound text messages to customers on the status of power-restoration work.

He said, "Communications is key, not only to customers but also to other agencies. If the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing, there's trouble ahead."

Communications between the utility's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and field crews is critical during power restoration, and past hurricanes have taken down commercial cell towers, making cell phones unusable. During the 2004 hurricane season, when Orlando was lashed by hurricanes Charley, Francis and Jeanne, commercial cell towers were down and OUC was forced to communicate with field crews by radio.

After that season, Zambito recalled, OUC outfitted trucks with ruggedized laptops and tablets that utilized the AT&T FirstNet emergency communications network. That network is reserved for the exclusive use of first responders, providing users with additional communication options. Even if a storm doesn't take down cell towers, commercial networks will be jammed with callers trying to check on friends and families. Using the AT&T FirstNet network ensures first responders can communicate throughout an emergency.

All utilities interviewed praised FMEA for the quality of its pre-storm planning and communications.

### Key Lessons Learned from Earlier Storms

When it comes to storms, Florida public power utilities embrace continuous learning and improvement. At the end

of each storm season, utilities review and update their storm procedures and manuals to capture lessons learned and enhance their response to next season's storms.

Prior to the June start date of hurricane season, FMEA hosts an annual Hurricane Forum for members. Florida public power utilities from across the state come together for an expert briefing of the upcoming storm season to share what works well and hear from other disaster preparation and response experts. The event also helps build relationships that matter when mutual aid is activated and utilities come to the assistance of fellow utilities.

In recent years, OUC has gotten more bang for its mutual aid buck after it centralized all mutual aid workers and trucks in one location, Zambito said.

"After Irma, we realized how much time was lost when we had mutual aid crews and trucks located across our service area. Now, we lodge and feed them all in one location, restock their trucks, give them their lunches and send them out."

When it comes to mutual aid, leaders who were interviewed said it was very beneficial to go with who you know. It's not uncommon for Florida municipal utilities to have long-standing reciprocal mutual aid relationships with other utilities in which crews from one utility consistently come to the other's aid. This familiarity with each other's personnel and systems has increased efficiency and reduced safety risks, leaders said.

For example, for nearly two decades, GRU and Lafayette Utilities System (LUS) of Louisiana have gone to each other's service areas after a storm.

"We know the quality of work they do, and they know our work standards," Jordan said. "It all leads to a better, more

integrated workflow that requires less oversight. Plus, a lot of us who were line-workers 20 years ago are now in management. It's so important that you know and trust the people you work with during power restoration. We have also developed lasting relationships with several utilities we are in close proximity to as well." ■

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- NEVER keep a live generator near or in flood waters.

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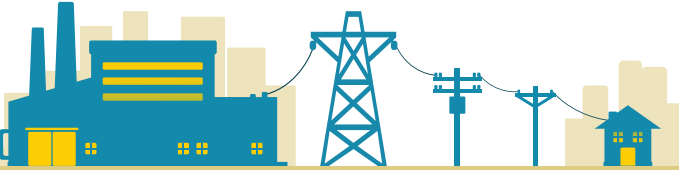
Keep in mind that crews will respond to outages only while it is safe to be outside.

Up-to-date outage information available at [ouc.com/outage](http://ouc.com/outage).

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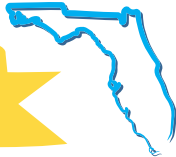


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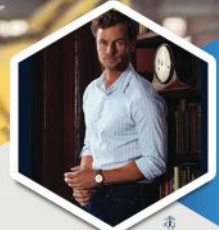
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# MUTUAL AID

## IT'S NOT A JOB, IT'S A CALLING

by John Egan

Family. Calling. Brotherhood. Heroes. First Responders. Way of life. Those are some of the words used to describe what drove mutual aid workers from across the United States who traveled to Florida in 2022 to help our members recover from Hurricanes Ian and Nicole. We are grateful to each and every worker!

Mutual aid workers streamed to our side in 2022 to help FMEA members recover from one of the most destructive hurricane seasons on record. Hundreds of public power utility employees from 175 utilities in 23 states, including Florida, took part in mutual aid efforts to restore power safely and efficiently following hurricanes Ian and Nicole.

Within 48 hours of Hurricane Ian making landfall on September 27, Florida's public power utilities, with the help of mutual aid workers, restored power to 80 percent of customers who experienced outages. Within 72 hours, 99 percent of the more than 1.5 million Florida public power customers that were capable of accepting electric service had service restored.

Ian was far more destructive than Hurricane Nicole, which made landfall November 10.

We interviewed leaders from two public power utilities and two public power statewide associations to learn more about what drives the mutual aid workers who leave the comfort of their homes to run toward danger.



### Voices from Alabama, Louisiana, Massachusetts and Minnesota

The four executives we interviewed agreed that mutual aid workers do what they do because they are committed to each other, and because the door swings both ways: Workers come to Florida to help restore power after a hurricane, but Florida utility workers return the favor by traveling to other communities and states to get the lights back on after a natural disaster hits.



“Helping others is what we’re all about as a public power utility,” said Brian Chandler, general manager of Alabama’s City of Troy electric utility. “If others are willing to accept our help, we’re ready to send it. We send mutual aid crews to Florida because we know we’re going to need their help sooner or later.” He continued, “The people in Florida always take real good care of our people. And FMEA does a great job as traffic cop requesting resources, matching resources to needs and redirecting crews to where they are most needed.”

Years ago, when he was a construction lineman, Mike Willetts, director of training and safety at the Minnesota Municipal Utility Association (MMUA), traveled to Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, Missouri and other parts of Minnesota to provide mutual aid to public power utilities. “When something unfortunate happens, you want to help. I make new friends every time I give, or receive, mutual aid.”

## Where They Came From, Who They Helped

- **City of Troy, Alabama:** *This utility sent 10 mutual aid workers to New Smyrna Beach Utilities for Ian and five workers to Ocala for Nicole.*
- **Lafayette Utilities System, Louisiana:** *This utility sent 17 workers to Gainesville and 17 workers to Lakeland for Ian. For Nicole, they sent 17 workers to Tallahassee.*
- **Minnesota Municipal Utility Association:** *Forty workers from 14 members and MMUA came to Bartow for Ian.*
- **Northeast Public Power Association:** *Twenty-four members from Massachusetts and Connecticut sent a total of 56 workers to JEA and Bartow for Ian.*



An MMUA employee who served in the Marines told Willetts that being a lineworker is almost like being a Marine: “You run toward the problem. It’s not just a job, it’s a calling.”

The four leaders we interviewed agreed this spirit is animated by the ethos of public power: Community is the heart of Florida’s public power utilities.

Greg Labbé, electric operations manager for Louisiana’s Lafayette Utilities System (LUS), recalled that numerous Florida community-owned utilities sent mutual aid crews after Hurricane Delta flattened parts of Louisiana in 2020. “That’s the way it’s supposed to work,” he said. LUS is Louisiana’s largest publicly owned electric utility, serving about 70,000 customers. He added: “I have a family. My second family is LUS. My third family is Florida’s public power utilities.”

Lifelong friendships have been forged during either mutual aid power restoration efforts or lineworker competitions. Those friendships often are nourished at lineworker competitions held by FMEA and the American Public Power Association.

Labbé said he and a longtime friend from Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) went deer hunting in Florida shortly before Christmas. They met during a mutual aid deployment. MMUA’s Willetts said one of his best friends is a retired Colorado Springs Utilities worker whom he met at a lineworker competition. Every year, they hunt for elk in southwestern Colorado.

“We begin friendships during mutual aid deployments, and we strengthen them during lineworker competitions,” Labbé said. Or the order could be reversed. Either way, it’s all about relationships and mutual commitment to helping others.

LUS has sent mutual aid crews to several Florida cities over the year, and numerous FMEA members — including Tallahassee,

GRU, Lakeland Electric, JEA, Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA), Keys Energy Services, Fort Pierce Utilities Authority and New Smyrna Beach Utilities — have traveled to Louisiana to help LUS restore power after natural disasters.

“Lineworkers love to get the lights back on, and they know they’ll need the help of others someday,” commented Nick Lawler, general manager of the Littleton (Massachusetts) Electric Light and Water Department. He’s also the mutual aid coordinator for the Northeast Public Power Association (NEPPA) and a member of the APPA Executive Committee. “People who provide mutual aid are like a family. They understand that public power is built on communities. When we go out on mutual aid, we always treat their customers as our customers. . . . I make new friends every time I give, or receive, mutual aid.”

#### Lessons Learned

Several of those we interviewed emphasized the importance of bringing a truck mechanic on mutual aid deployments. Often, this bit of wisdom stemmed from a prior year when a bucket truck broke down while on a mutual aid deployment. Several organizations are now bringing a vehicle mechanic with them on mutual aid deployments.

MMUA’s Willetts said his statewide association started bringing mechanics after a 2020 mutual aid deployment, “and it came in real handy in 2022” when the transmission in a bucket truck failed and needed to be replaced while it was in Bartow. Similarly, he recalled that a few years ago, a crew from Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, had a Spanish-speaking lineworker who was able to communicate with tree-trimming crews when the crew arrived in Florida. Whether that was adroit planning or simple luck, he couldn’t say.

After Hurricane Irma hit Florida in 2017, the NEPPA sent crews to the Sunshine State to

help restore power. Lawler, president of the NEPPA Board, recalled that one NEPPA crew’s truck suffered an equipment breakdown. Since then, vehicle mechanics are part of every mutual aid deployment.

LUS’ Labbé said his utility added a mechanic for the first time this year, and it paid dividends right away: A bucket truck lost its differential while on the road to Tallahassee to help recover from Nicole. Workers at the City of Tallahassee helped rebuild it completely. On a different occasion, he said an LUS bucket truck’s transmission failed while on a mutual aid deployment to New Smyrna Beach Utilities. “Things break when you run it seven days a week, 16 hours a day,” he said. “There are lots of things to think about.”

Like, for example, barbecue. Labbé recounted the time his utility sent crews to Vidalia, Louisiana, two years ago after a deep freeze there. They did their homework



before leaving and saw that all the local restaurants were closed. Although it was assumed that Vidalia would feed his crews, they took no chances and packed uncooked barbecue in their equipment trailer and cooked it on site.

Depending on how hard a storm hits a particular area, hotels lacking self-generation might be closed or may be full. Restaurants may not be open. Utility warehouses could be damaged. So, the hard lesson of experience has taught mutual aid crews to pack their equipment trailers with cots, inflatable mattresses, sleeping bags, spare clothes, blankets (depending on the weather), food, water and pole-climbing equipment in addition to the tools and equipment that would be needed for power restoration. Mutual aid missions are definitely “Bring Your Own Stuff,” just to be sure.

Even so, mutual aid workers sometimes are surprised by local conditions. Troy’s Chandler recalled that when his utility’s crews got to New Smyrna Beach, where rainfall totals were around two feet, they encountered flooding like they had never seen. “We scrambled to locate hip waders from our hometown and had them sent New Smyrna Beach.”

All interviewees stressed the importance of safety briefings before workers go out to the field. The host utility typically provides a local lineworker, called a “bird dog,” to accompany mutual aid crews and guide them around the host city’s streets and its electrical system.

#### **Until Next Time**

Plenty of adventure — and hard work — greeted crews who responded to Florida’s mutual aid requests in 2022. FMEA and its members deeply appreciate all the people who traveled to Florida to help get the lights back on after Hurricanes Ian and Nicole.

FMEA’s member utilities are ready to return the favor. ■

## **Hurricane Ian and Sanibel Island Power Grid Rebuild: An Insider’s View of Utility Mutual Aid**

*by Russ Hissom, Owner, Utility Accounting Education Specialists*

I’m originally from the upper Midwest. The upper Midwest has snow and the occasional tornado for storms. Snow is easy; stay home if possible, and shovel or plow when it’s over. Tornadoes happen infrequently, but when they do, there is little time to prepare, only to seek shelter and hope that the tornado hits a rural cornfield and dissipates.

Hurricanes are much different, as you all know, but especially for a Florida newbie. There seems to be at least a week of watching and worrying about a hurricane’s landfall. There’s something about rooting for a hurricane to miss your location because that means it will impact someone else. It doesn’t seem right.

These were the thoughts as we saw Hurricane Ian form and head north in the Caribbean. Is Ian headed for Tampa? Wait, I know people in Tampa, and I don’t want them to be impacted. The storm track is moving south and east? I don’t want Sanibel to be impacted, either.

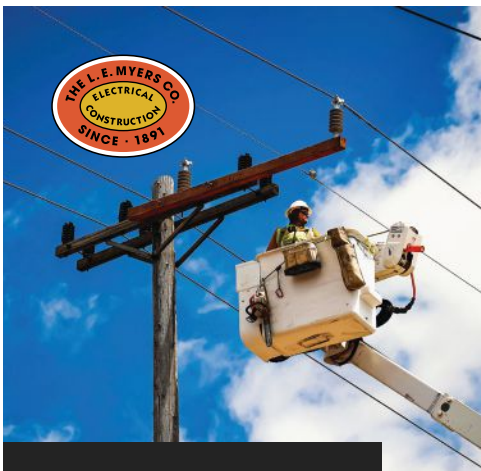
I learned more about the cone and spaghetti models than I ever knew. I followed Mike’s Weather page on Facebook hourly. (PS: Mike’s initial forecast of the storm track was spot on.) I prayed. But the inevitable happened, and Hurricane Ian directly hit Sanibel and Pine Islands. You couldn’t have painted a more giant bullseye on the islands. The eye of the storm was 30 miles wide, and on the Weather Channel, we watched the radar showing the eastern side of the eyewall go right through our neighborhood! We feared the worst, even though our house was built to Category 5 standards.

The day after Ian’s landfall (September 29) was no better. We woke up to find the Sanibel Causeway had washed away in three areas, cutting off the island from the mainland. How would we do repairs? Was our house even standing? There was no information to be had.



To read the entire article visit: [www.flpublicpower.com/sanibel-island-rebuild](http://www.flpublicpower.com/sanibel-island-rebuild).





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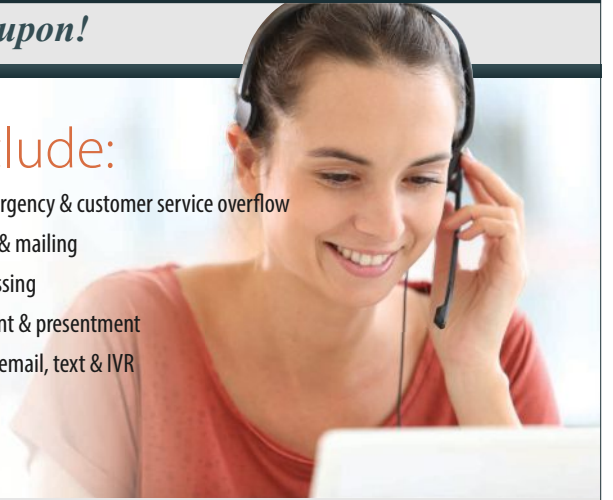
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# The Juice Was Worth the Squeeze:

## Distribution System Reliability Efforts Paid Off During 2022 Hurricane Season

by John Egan

Making an electric distribution system more resilient to better withstand hurricanes can be a challenge for all kinds of reasons: design of the system, availability of skilled labor, supply chain constraints, scheduling the work and weighing its potential impact on customer prices. But FMEA members who were interviewed said the reliability investments they made in recent years paid off during the 2022 hurricane season.

“We got punched in the face with Irma in 2017,” recalled Scott Bishop, interim associate general manager for electric delivery and manager of emerging technologies at Lakeland Electric (LE). “We needed to get better in all sorts of ways. We did, and it showed after Hurricane Ian. Reliability investments pay off every day.”

“LE went all-in on system hardening after Irma,” he continued. “Irma was a wake-up call. Power restoration after Ian was much better than after Irma.”

“We have made great strides on reliability while keeping our electric prices competitive,” said Ed Liberty, director of the City

of Lake Worth Beach’s Electric Utility (LWBEU). “The juice has definitely been worth the squeeze.”

Work is underway at LWBEU to implement a comprehensive, multi-year \$100 million effort to harden its distribution system and improve electric reliability. The size of the program was warranted by the lower state of reliability when Liberty came aboard in 2017. “We had severe reliability issues back then,” he said.

Hurricane Ian, a Category 4 Hurricane that made landfall September 28, 2022, was one of the deadliest and most destructive hurricanes to ever hit Florida, with

146 confirmed deaths. The storm caused an estimated \$50-\$65 billion in insured damages, trailing only 2005’s Hurricane Katrina in insured damages.

Ian was a slow-moving storm that pummeled Florida with extreme winds, torrential rain and storm surge. But power restoration efforts were expedited by reliability investments that Florida’s public power utilities have made since Hurricane Irma in 2017.

For more on what other FMEA members have done to improve reliability in recent years, see the “Money Well Spent” article in the Winter 2022 issue of *RELAY* magazine.

## Undergrounding Distribution Lines

"We were hit hard by Hurricane Ian, nearly as hard as Irma in 2017," said LE's Bishop, who has been with the utility for 11 years. "At one point during Ian, about 65,000 of our 132,000 customers were out of power."

LE will spend about \$750,000 this year to underground its distribution lines, Bishop estimated, continuing a practice adopted following Hurricane Irma. That's about what the utility has spent each year since Irma flattened LE's system in 2017. Undergrounding accounts for about 25 percent of the utility's \$3 million annual investment in system hardening.

He estimated roughly 40 percent of LE's distribution system is underground today. Prior to Irma in 2017, about 28 percent of the city's distribution system was underground. The cost of undergrounding lines is a critical limiting factor: Undergrounding distribution lines costs about three times what it cost to string them overhead.

Winter Park is another FMEA member that has been undergrounding its distribution system as a way to increase reliability and resilience. "We did well during Ian, but

our undergrounding efforts caused other problems: Flooding knocked out two sets of switchgear, each of which serves about 1,000 customers," said Dan D'Alessandro, director for the electric utility.

Switchgear functions like a traffic signal that directs medium-voltage electricity to different circuits.

Winter Park, which serves about 15,000 customers in central Florida, municipalized its distribution system in 2005, in large part because the previous owner didn't prioritize reliability for their community.

D'Alessandro estimated that his annual undergrounding budget went from about \$3.5 million in 2017 to about \$7.4 million in 2023. Best of all, residents aren't being charged for the utility's undergrounding program. Instead, the utility is using its net revenue to pay for the cost of undergrounding (see sidebar in *RELAY* Fall 2022 issue, p. 19).

"Once we cover our costs, every penny that's left over is invested in the network," said D'Alessandro, who began his career as a lineworker.

Currently, about 73 percent of Winter Park's distribution lines are underground. By contrast, only about 58 percent of its system was underground before Irma hit in 2017.

At the peak during Ian, D'Alessandro estimated that about 3,850 Winter Park customers lost power. Roughly 2,000 of those could be attributed to the failed switchgear. In comparison, he said, many more customers — about 8,800 — lost power during Hurricane Irma in 2017.

"For Winter Park, Ian was a flood event — a 500-year flood," he said. "Irma was more of a wind event." "We're undergrounding our distribution lines to improve electric reliability and enhance our city's aesthetics by preserving its many beautiful trees."

LWBEU is also placing some distribution lines underground, mainly replacing decades-old direct-bury lines and conductors with equipment inside a conduit sleeve. Typically, direct-bury equipment is replaced when it fails, said Liberty. He estimated that well over 90 percent of the utility distribution system is currently overhead.





### More Aggressive Tree Trimming

Because hurricanes can wreak havoc on Florida's verdant tree canopy, FMEA members are more aggressively trimming trees to widen clearance between a line and a tree, reducing the chance of a contact that could cause a fault or an outage.

Consistent with industry best practices, New Smyrna Beach Utilities (NSBU) has spent \$2.5 million over the past two years on its transmission and distribution vegetation management programs. Starting in fiscal year 2023, which began in October 2022, the utility, which serves about 30,000 customers, adopted a three-year trim cycle. The NSBU's current distribution vegetation management spending plan is about \$800,000 per year to trim trees along its 250 miles of overhead distribution lines.

Winter Park also has stepped up its tree trimming efforts in recent years as part of its system-hardening efforts.

"Undergrounding our lines allows us to eliminate some tree trimming cycles," said D'Alessandro. "We used to trim to

a 3-foot clearance, but it's more than that now."

He added that arborists seek customers' approval before they trim trees, and the customers are generally supportive when they learn why Winter Park wants to trim their trees.

Last year, three days before Hurricane Ian hit, D'Alessandro said that he gathered the utility's lineworkers together and asked, "Where are the tree trimming problem areas?" Workers identified four specific areas, and those areas got an extra dose of trimming prior to the storm arriving. Those four areas reported substantially fewer outages during Ian. The City of Winter Park's annual tree trimming budget is about \$1.1 million; about \$375,000 of that is spent by the utility.

"There is no argument that our more aggressive stance on tree trimming saves a substantial amount of time during power restoration," he said.

### Pole Changeouts

Like tree trimming, upgrading utility poles to withstand hurricane-force winds is

part of every Florida public power utility's system-hardening work.

NSBU has spent approximately \$2.5 million replacing and hardening approximately 670 utility poles in recent years, according to Julie Couillard, director of engineering at the utility. Pole changeouts are part of the utility's planned efforts to adopt more rigorous maintenance programs.

LWBEU has begun the process of upgrading all its utility poles to withstand Category 5 hurricanes, where winds have a sustained speed of 157 miles per hour or more. Asked why the utility chose to harden its poles against a Category 5 storm, Ed Liberty, director of electric utilities, said, "Because there is no Category 6. We live on the coastline, and we're asking our customers to help fund significant improvements. We can't stop short and deliver to them a system that isn't designed to withstand the wind strengths we could see in a major hurricane."

### Deploying Advanced Technology

Advanced technology of one sort or another is being used by most Florida community-owned electric utilities to harden their systems and improve

reliability. Since 2018, LE has installed more than 60 automatic reclosers in the middle of circuits to “sectionalize” its distribution system.

Automatic reclosers are like smaller versions of substation breakers, explained LE’s Bishop. They attach to utility poles and allow the utility to pinpoint outages and focus its power-restoration efforts, he added.

“Because we had sectionalized our system, we were able to send crews to a specific site to begin power-restoration work after Ian,” Bishop said. “Of the 65,000 customers who lost power, we were able to restore about 35,000 customers in one day after Ian left our area. Without sectionalizing, it would have taken two to four days to restore those customers.”

Jason C. Bailey, assistant director for system operations at LWBEU, said his utility recently started using drones to inspect transmission and key equipment as well as infrared (IR) scans of the entire network to identify hot spots that could be an advance warning of equipment failure.

“Using drones and IR scans really paid off for us after Ian,” he said. “They allowed us to repair the equipment in a more-timely fashion.”

Other technology upgrades implemented by LWBEU — advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) and updating its SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) system — helped speed up power restoration after Ian, commented Liberty, LWBEU’s director. The utility is in the process of installing an outage management system (OMS) to further improve reliability and shorten outage restoration times.

As part of its system-wide Modernization Roadmap plans, prior to Ian, NSBU installed 151 TripSaver devices and

18 automatic reclosers to reduce outages and the number of customers impacted as outages occur, Couillard said. Another 72 TripSavers and 19 automatic reclosers are scheduled to be installed by March 2023, she added.

NSBU also completed installation of a new OMS shortly before Ian hit last September. John McMurray, director of strategic programs for the utility, said the OMS included a web outage viewer that enabled customers and utility workers to view the status of outages and their estimated restoration times.

“At the same time,” McMurray continued, “we also implemented a new communications platform that allowed us to send outbound messaging (text, recorded phone message and email) to our customers regarding the overall status of restoration efforts, as well as targeted messages to specific neighborhoods. This was especially helpful in the last 24 hours of storm restoration to verify where small numbers of customers remained without power.”

Over the next two years, the utility plans to install AMI and a related smart-grid

communications infrastructure to build on the OMS’ system’s capabilities, including advanced distribution and automation technology, he said. These technology upgrades also will provide the ability for customers to monitor their daily electricity use and investigate conservation options.

“These same grid modernization steps also will provide the technological basis to monitor and potentially control loads associated with electric vehicle charging, solar net metering and other customer-side technologies that can potentially interface with the electric grid,” McMurray said.

### Metrics

Leaders at some of Florida’s community-owned electric utilities report improved reliability metrics, such as SAIFI (System Average Interruption Frequency Index) and SAIDI (System Average Interruption Duration Index), though they note that outages stemming from hurricanes are excluded from those data sets. “When there’s a hurricane and straight-line winds, people will understand if the lights go out,” commented LE’s Scott Bishop. “What gets them upset is when it’s



a clear blue sky with no wind — and the power goes off.”

During non-storm periods, a lot of unscheduled outages can be traced to animals making contact with electrical equipment.

Utility leaders told us that squirrels, racoons, snakes, Cuban tree frogs and other animals often make contact with an electric line. While all Florida utilities struggle against wildlife in their effort to improve reliability, one utility in particular, LWBEU, has an additional, colorful problem: iguanas. During cold snaps, iguanas can freeze while crawling along electrical equipment, seeking warmth. Sometimes they fall harmlessly to the ground, but other times they create a fault leading to an outage.

LWBEU has installed longer insulators, animal guards and enhanced its tree trimming to keep iguanas off lines as part of its reliability improvement efforts, which has succeeded in improving its reliability scores.

Winter Park’s undergrounding program has dramatically improved its SAIDI and SAIFI scores. Before it began its undergrounding program in earnest, in 2018, customers experienced nearly five hours of interruptions per year, on average. That number was down to less than one hour in 2022, D’Alessandro said.



### Hardest Part of System Hardening

When asked what the most difficult aspect of system hardening was, LE’s Bishop said, “Managing the supply chain — it’s been awful for everyone.” He estimated his utility’s equipment costs have increased by an average of at least 45 percent since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

NSBU’s Couillard spoke for many utilities when she said material lead times and labor availability were her utility’s biggest difficulties in completing projects across its system. The cost and lead times for distribution transformers are vexing utilities across the country: Prices have doubled or tripled since 2019 while lead times now stretch out as long as 18 months or more. Prior to COVID-19, lead times were in the two- to three-month range.

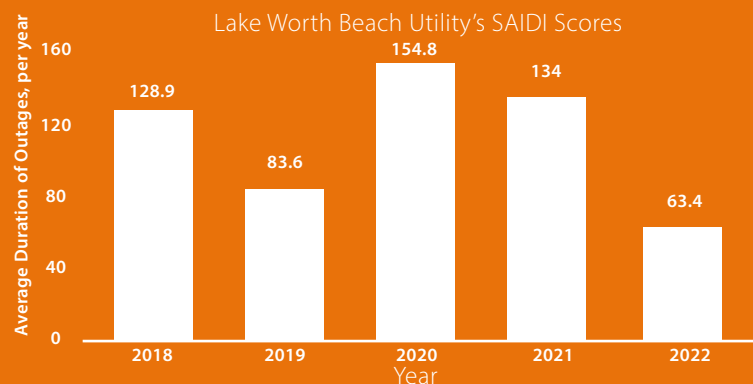
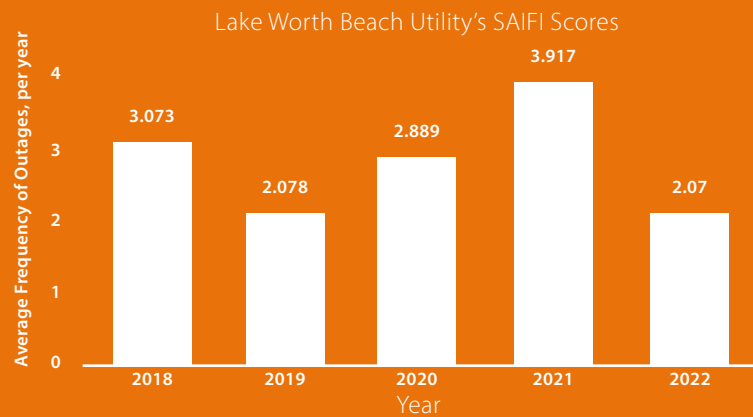
Managing expectations was a big challenge cited by Winter Park’s D’Alessandro and LWBEU’s Liberty.

“For Winter Park, the biggest challenge of system hardening is managing customer expectations and understandings about our undergrounding program,” said D’Alessandro.

At LWBEU, Utilities Director Liberty said, “Our City Commission has been right to challenge our plans and has supported our requests to fund system improvements. A project of this magnitude is not easy for a small utility to fund and execute, and the data shows that the return on investment is beginning to be felt by our customers.” ■

## Lake Worth Beach Electric Utility’s Reliability Metrics Improve

Source: Lake Worth Beach Electric Utility



# Dos and Don'ts for Spending Federal Grant Funding

by Michelle F. Zaltsberg, Shareholder, Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC, Orlando, Florida

In fiscal year 2021, the federal government obligated more than \$1.3 trillion in grants. But, as they say, there's no such thing as a free lunch. Spending federal grant dollars requires compliance with award terms and conditions, including, among other things, adherence to the federal procurement standards found in the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for federal awards (commonly referred to as the "Uniform Rules") at 2 C.F.R. Part 200. The Uniform Rules are generally applicable to all grants made by federal agencies to non-federal entities, i.e., states, state agencies, local governments (including municipal electric utilities), tribes, territories and private nonprofits. The federal procurement standards are found at 2 C.F.R. § 200.317-327 and are intended to promote full and open competition and cost reasonableness in federal grant spending. Failure to comply with these standards may result in loss of federal grant funds either by disallowance of requested amounts or clawback of amounts already funded and spent. Below are a few "dos and don'ts" to ensure compliance with these standards:

**1. DO** follow your own document procurement procedures. The Uniform Rules require each non-federal entity have documented procurement procedures and follow them. In the event your own procedures and the federal regulations differ, follow the strictest application — **DON'T** relax your own rules because Uncle Sam is footing the bill.

**2. DO** understand the thresholds for competition. Under the federal procurement standards, no competition is required for "micro-purchases" — goods and services costing \$10,000 or less. Written quotations

must be obtained for purchases over \$10,000, up to \$250,000. Formal competition is required for purchases in excess of \$250,000. But, see No. 1 and follow your own rules if they are stricter.

**3. DON'T** neglect the cost analysis, especially under emergency conditions. A competitively procured contract typically gets a presumption of cost reasonableness, but the procurement standards require a cost or price analysis for all procurements in excess of \$250,000, including contract modifications. The Uniform Rules provide that "a cost is reasonable if, in its nature and amount, it does not exceed that which would be incurred by a prudent person under the circumstances prevailing at the time the decision was made to incur the cost." Thus, a non-federal entity will want to document the circumstances leading to the decision to incur the cost and the evaluation of the price or cost components and how they compare to other offers, historical prices paid and market research. This is especially important when a procurement is made without competition under emergency circumstances, e.g., after a natural disaster, as there will be no presumption of reasonableness without competition.

**4. DON'T** expect the federal government to fund or reimburse cost-plus-percentage-of-cost contracts — they are prohibited by regulation. A cost-plus-percentage-of-cost contract is one where:

- Payment is made at a predetermined percentage rate;
- The predetermined percentage rate is applied to actual performance costs;
- The contractor's entitlement is uncertain at the time of contracting; and

- The contractor's entitlement increases commensurately with the increased performance cost.

**5. DO** make sure to include all the provisions required by the Uniform Rules and federal agency guidance in your federally funded contracts. The provisions are listed at 2 C.F.R. § 200.327 and Appendix II to 2 C.F.R. Part 200. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has published a helpful guide on each provision's applicability with sample language, available at [www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_contract-provisions-guide\\_6-14-2021.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_contract-provisions-guide_6-14-2021.pdf).

Most importantly, **DON'T** underestimate the value of documentation and **DO** document every aspect of the procurement process. Millions of dollars in federal grant funding have been won or lost on adequate documentation of grant spending, including procurement decisions. Even a back-of-the-envelope cost analysis is better than nothing (and may turn out to be vital to your ability to obtain and retain funding).

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