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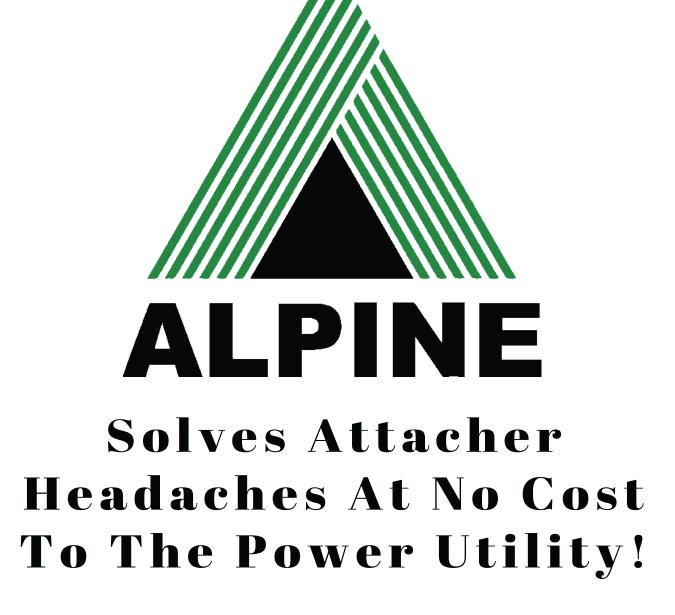


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Within the last two years, three FMEA members marked milestone anniversaries — either 100 or 125 years of service. We visited with representatives of those Florida public power communities to learn about their future as well as their past and present.

20 JEA's Journey Home - and Into the Future

JEA is three years into a remarkable transformation. When the utility's then-leadership tried to privatize it in 2018, employees could have checked out. Instead, they dug in, rallying around each other and the organization's longtime mission to serve. The effort to privatize JEA came crashing down in 2020. Under the direction of a new leadership team, the venerable community-owned utility is returning to its roots of service.

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Where in the world is *RELAY*?

Xunantunich's name means "Maiden of the Rock" in the Mayan language, and, like many names given to Mayan archaeological sites, is a modern name; the ancient name is unknown. The maiden refers to the ghost of a woman claimed by countless people to inhabit the site. She is dressed completely in white and has fire-red glowing eyes. She generally appears in front of "El Castillo," ascends the stone stairs and disappears into a stone wall. She did not make an appearance when FMEA Creative Director Garnie Holmes visited the site with his copy of *RELAY* magazine. Don't forget a copy on your next trip! Send pictures to relay@flpublicpower.com.

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Celebrating Public Power

Public power utilities have many reasons to celebrate. In fact, we have so much to celebrate that we even designate a full week in October every year as Public Power Week to highlight the unique attributes and benefits public power brings to our customers and communities. This weeklong celebration of public power typically results in open houses, festivals, barbecues, safety demonstrations and other customer appreciation events throughout our communities. But Florida public power utilities have many other reasons to celebrate well beyond Public Power Week.

On Wednesday, August 30, Hurricane Idalia made landfall in Florida's Big Bend near Keaton Beach as a strong Category 3 hurricane, with maximum sustained winds at 125 mph. Idalia tore into this mostly rural part of Florida, splitting trees and power poles in half, ripping roofs off buildings and flooding roadways.

At peak, Idalia left nearly 300,000 customers in the dark, with more than 42,000 of them from Florida's public power utilities. FMEA coordinated more than 350 mutual aid resources from in- and out-of-state utilities to assist our Florida utilities in restoration. All told, 58 utilities from 13 different states, plus several FMEA member utilities, left their homes to come help those in need.

Fortunately, many of Florida's public power communities were spared Idalia's wrath, and those that were impacted were able to restore power within 48 hours. Many of our own utilities, along with several of our out-of-state mutual aid providers, were also able to provide mutual aid to other harder-hit utilities. From our preparedness activities and mutual aid coordination arrangements that speed up restoration efforts to the investments we are making in our systems that are reducing outages, our success in restoring power so quickly to our customers — and still being able to help others in need — is truly a reason to celebrate.

The public power business model is an American tradition that is deeply rooted in many local communities. As electric services became more readily available across the country in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some communities, in an effort to better the lives of their local citizens, began providing streetlights to illuminate their downtowns. With a growing number of private electric companies electrifying cities and towns, some communities were so small that they were not profitable for private utility investment. These communities took it upon themselves to form a community-owned electric utility. Today, there are approximately 2,000 public power utilities across the country, with 33 in Florida.

The City of Starke electric utility, Florida's oldest public power utility, was established in 1890 and has been providing efficient, reliable and affordable electricity to their customers for more than a century. While

Florida's youngest public power utility was established in 2005, the vast majority of Florida's public power utilities were created pre-1930 — before most (if not all) of us were even born. And though we may not have been around to celebrate when each community turned on the power for the first time, we can celebrate milestone achievements. Congratulations to Ocala Electric Utility, Orlando Utilities Commission and the City of Wauchula on your recent anniversary celebrations!

In this issue of *RELAY*, we also celebrate JEA. After a tumultuous few years resulting in a failed privatization effort, we're excited to celebrate JEA and their journey back to a strong public power community providing reliable and affordable power to their more than 500,000 customers in the Jacksonville area. This is a celebration that will continue well into the future.

Hurricane response, anniversaries and commitments to our business model and the communities we serve are certainly reasons to celebrate public power, but they aren't the only reasons. On a daily basis, public power deserves to be celebrated. We provide excellent and responsive customer service. We care about local jobs and support our local economy. We are transparent and uniquely accountable to our communities, not distant shareholders. And we focus on the specific needs of our communities. Those are all reasons to celebrate public power.



Executive Insights

by Amy Zubaly, FMEA Executive Director

Leadership Corner



Q&A with Javier Cisneros Director of Utilities, Fort Pierce Utilities Authority

Javier Cisneros was named director of utilities (DOU) in January 2022 after 22 years of service across multiple utility divisions at Fort Pierce Utilities Authority (FPUA), bringing with him a unique and comprehensive perspective of FPUA's many strategic and operational needs and opportunities.

Throughout his various roles at FPUA, Javier has worked with multiple teams to modernize, improve and expand FPUA's operations. From his first role — where he led the utility's first initiative to digitize paper maps, ultimately creating the utility's first water/wastewater system model — to his current role, Javier proudly invests himself fully in the utility and community. His first year as DOU was a critical year, with challenges caused by the 2022 natural gas price spikes and an attempted private equity takeover of the utility's wastewater system. After fully revamping the public affairs approach, and securing funding to relocate the wastewater plant, Javier is now working diligently to institute processes to avoid similar challenges in the future. He also continues modernizing FPUA's utility and customer support through initiatives like advanced metering infrastructure (AMI), fiber internet expansion, outage notification capabilities and more. Javier is highly involved with FMEA and the Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA), serving on the Board of Directors for both organizations.

About FPUA: Fort Pierce Utilities Authority serves approximately 29,000 electric customers and provides natural gas, water and waste-water utilities, as well as communications services through FPUAnet.

Tell us a little bit about your background.

Born and raised in Okeechobee, I am a proud Brahman Bull graduate. Raised by a single mother of two sons, I loved growing up in a small town in Florida. We grew up as part of a farming family, so I have a great appreciation for farmers. I also think that's where I learned my work ethic and value for teamwork, which I try to inspire at FPUA every day. I am married to my high school sweetheart, and we have two amazing adult children; we are all proud graduates of Indian River State College. I also graduated with a bachelor's and a master's degree from the University of Central Florida.

You have been with the utility in various roles since January 2000. Tell us about your leadership journey to become the director of utilities at FPUA.

My role at FPUA would not be possible without the incredible foresight and mentoring by Bill Thiess, a previous DOU who also worked his way into the position and recruited me (and many other FPUA leaders today) early in his tenure. My first role at FPUA was as the GIS manager, a position new to FPUA, where I worked closely alongside Bill and the leadership team to develop a road map that included transitioning from paper maps to laptops with GIS and working closely with each operational group. Over my entire career, I was fortunate to be part of the FPUA think tank, which allowed me to move into progressively more responsible roles. I am also fortunate to work for such a varied utility. I worked in water and wastewater engineering for 10 years, then moved to electric and gas engineering for eight years before moving into a director role and ultimately into the DOU role in January 2022.

What are some of the greatest strengths you see in FPUA? What are other areas of opportunity at the utility?

FPUA employees (#TeamUA) are FPUA's greatest strength. We are a strong team of 265 civic-minded individuals who work hard to serve the community. Our electric crews take pride in restoring power as safely and quickly as possible. Our water team takes immense pride in the drinking water that we serve. Our wastewater team is working incredibly hard to relocate a wastewater plant, which includes completely redesigning our conveyance system. Our customer service team is constantly working diligently to help customers with their daily needs. And so much more is happening behind the scenes (too much to fit into this article!).



Whether you've created them or adopted them, opportunities for improvements are always challenging, but they can showcase the strength and character of your team. The next three to five years will be challenging due to our aging workforce. We will need to fill these roles with the same type of high-caliber and civic-minded individuals who make up #TeamUA. And we are looking forward to making that happen.

FPUA is governed by a utility authority. How do you feel this benefits the overall community and ratepayers?

In 1972, the citizens of Fort Pierce voted to create a separate utility authority with a charter that defines the responsibilities for the FPUA Board and the City Commission. Over the years, and especially during the last two years, I have seen how valuable this model is for the community that it serves. Because we are owned by the community, the FPUA Board and leadership team take customer feedback to heart and are able to adapt and make business decisions at the local level to meet our community's needs. The FPUA Board has made important decisions over the last few decades that would have been more difficult without this model, and I know customers have been able to provide direct feedback to us (at public Board meetings, through the City Commission and even just in our customer service lobby) that would have been more difficult without this model too.

How do you seek to engage the community in shaping the work of the utility?

Community engagement is one of FPUA's top strategic priorities, and it is one of the tasks I was charged with when the FPUA Board named me DOU in 2022. I've had the pleasure of reimagining our community engagement possibilities, including creating an entirely new public affairs division for the utility. We started our efforts with companywide branding workshops to identify opportunities for improvements, and we are currently developing customer surveys to collect public feedback. The utility world has many fast-moving pieces and parts, so it requires constant engagement with our community to ensure the community understands how national, state and local decisions impact essential services for our customers, and how FPUA is working hard to serve them. Toward that end, we launched a Utility Advisory Committee in 2022, which is made up of volunteer citizens who provide feedback and support on critical utility projects and programs. We also rely on our customers to guide our expansion projects when we know that certain neighborhoods are seeking specific utility services. Importantly, FPUA's leadership is also constantly engaged with elected officials at all levels to help them learn about FPUA, a local hometown utility provider.

How does the utility support the needs of the Fort Pierce community?

Fort Pierce is a special community full of charm and local pride. Our team supports our community by sponsoring local nonprofits and having a presence at local events where customers can get to know us and ask questions. Our leadership team is highly involved in local boards, and FPUA encourages employees to support the community through volunteerism by offering paid leave for volunteer service — and many employees take great pride in sharing their efforts with us. FPUA is highly engaged with the City of Fort Pierce, coordinating roadway and utility work where possible to reduce costs for taxpayers and ratepayers and through other programs like our street lighting initiative for neighborhood safety and our expanded weatherization program to reach more renters. Through Project CARE, we also offer bill pay support programs to help our customers in need and rebates to help modernize their homes.

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 the American Public Power Association (APPA) and FMEA and in other industry-related organizations?

The synergy of the utility world and problem-solving is fun for me. I am honored to be in a public power leadership role. I believe that utility people are civic-minded and always willing to help, so I find it rewarding to engage with the various teams and cultivate positive results. Over the past few years, the FPUA team has dedicated more resources to enable our employees to have a stronger presence at FMEA events, APPA conferences, FMPA workshops, etc. FPUA hosted the Lineman Competition in 2022, and this event is a great example of how public power engages with employees and the community.

Odds and Ends From Across the State

Charging Hub Opening Marks Major Step Forward for Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) EV Use Expansion Efforts

Currents

The grand opening of the Robinson ReCharge Mobility Hub in downtown Orlando on July 25 marked a major step forward in OUC's efforts to increase electric vehicle use as part of its pledge to significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions, OUC said.

One of the largest EV charging facilities in Florida, the Robinson site features six 240-kilowatt and 14 120-kilowatt Level 3-rated DC chargers capable of recharging almost all makes and models of battery-powered vehicles. The hub is conveniently accessible to EV users living near downtown as well as those who travel to or through it.

By supporting the construction of a robust EV charging infrastructure, which now includes the new hub and more than 400 Level 1 and Level 2 chargers spread across the region, OUC seeks to reduce "range anxiety," a barrier that buyers often cite in keeping them from switching from gas-powered to electric vehicles.

The \$2.9 million project was partly funded by a \$500,000 grant that project partners OUC, Power Electronics, the City of Orlando and Orange County secured from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. OUC covered most of the remaining costs of the project and donated property for the hub. CHA Engineering oversaw site engineering while Aireko Construction built the facility. The site utilizes Orlando-based NovaCharge's ChargeUp application for point-of-sale transaction management.



OUC Recognized as 'Most Trusted' Nationally for Sixth Year in a Row, Continues 'Sunriser' Streak



The Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) has been named "Most Trusted Brand" among U.S. energy providers for the sixth consecutive year, according to a national customer survey conducted by the data analytics and advisory firm Escalent. With a score of 747, OUC placed first in the nation among electric utilities included in the 2023 Cogent Syndicated Utility Trusted Brand &

Customer Engagement[™] Residential study.

OUC debuted on the "Most Trusted Brand" index in 2018, and claimed the top score among U.S. electric utilities in the 2020, 2022 and 2023 surveys.

In addition, OUC has been named a "SunRiser" by the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE) for the fifth consecutive year.

SunRisers are the seven utilities in the Southeast exhibiting the highest solar ambition — measured by the increase in watts-percustomer solar ratio between the base year (2022) and the four-year forecast (2026), according to SACE's Solar in the Southeast 2023 Report.

The report projected OUC reaching 1,763 solar watts per customer (SWPC) by 2026, an increase of 1,101 SWPC, or 166 percent, from 2022. The report also stated, that Florida "expanded its position as the Southeast region leader in total installed solar capacity, reaching 7,288 [megawatts] in 2022. The SACE forecast now shows the state exceeding 17 gigawatts (17,000 MW) by 2026."

OUC is committed to growing its solar energy footprint as part of the utility's path to net zero. In late 2024, two 74.5-megawatt solar farms are scheduled to open under a power purchase agreement. And later this year, OUC is installing the largest floating solar array in the Southeastern United States. The 2-megawatt system will be owned and operated by OUC and placed on a pond in southeast Orlando. This will be OUC's third floating solar project. Once completed, these solar projects will



boost OUC's solar capacity to 274 megawatts; that's enough power for 50,000 typical Florida homes.



Florida Public Power Participates in Gov. DeSantis' Labor Day Press Event

Gov. Ron DeSantis hosted a press conference in Perry on Labor Day to announce

significant power restoration progress in areas impacted by Hurricane Idalia. The governor extended an invitation to participate in the press conference to FMEA on behalf of municipal electric utilities.

Representing all of Florida public power, FMEA Executive Director Amy Zubaly stood at the podium with Gov. DeSantis, Florida Division of Emergency Management Director Kevin Guthrie, Florida Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis, Florida Sen. Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee), Duke Energy Florida President Melissa Seixas, Florida Power and Light (FPL) Vice President of Power Delivery Manny Miranda, and Tri-County Electric Cooperative (TCEC) CEO Julius Hackett. The Labor Day press conference took place at the Duke Energy and Tri-County co-op staging areas, with bucket trucks from the City of Tallahassee, FPL, TCEC and Duke setting the scene.

In his verbal comments, the governor lauded the municipals and other utilities for working together to quickly restore power to impacted areas and helping to restore areas of the state served by other utilities. Congratulations to Florida public power for your outstanding work to get your communities restored expeditiously and for helping neighbors in need.

Florida Public Power Utilities Speak at FWELF 2023

Florida public power was well represented at the 2023 Florida's Women in Energy Leadership Forum (FWELF) in August. FMEA was a proud Emerald Sponsor once again and attended the three-day event. This forum was initially launched to celebrate the success that women leaders in the energy industry have demonstrated in growing Florida's economy and diversifying the workforce. Now an annual event, this forum celebrates these women and their companies and further highlights the positive impact of Florida's electric and natural gas industries on employment and economic



development. The theme this year was #Build, and appropriately so, as Florida public power has been modernizing and hardening infrastructure throughout our communities for the past year. JEA Chief Operating Officer Raynetta Curry Marshall, Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA) General Manager and CEO Jacob Williams, City of Homestead Director of Electric Utilities Barbara Quiñones, JEA Managing Director and CEO Jay Stowe, FMPA Environmental Engineer Daniela Delpino, and Lakeland Electric Manager of Legislative and Regulatory Relations Cindy Clemmons all shared their expertise and public power perspectives with the conference attendees on their respective panels throughout the forum.



FMEA, FMPA Highlight Benefits of a Career in Linework for Florida Lineworker Appreciation Day

The Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) and Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA) used their social

media channels to highlight the benefits of linework in advance of Florida Lineworker Appreciation Day, which is recognized on August 26. There are more than 6,700 lineworkers in Florida, and nearly 1,000 of those are public power lineworkers who serve communities large and small throughout Florida.

Florida Lineworker Appreciation Day was created by the Florida House of Representatives in 2012 to show gratitude to the people who risk their lives daily to ensure reliable delivery of electricity throughout the state. It was designated in memory of Marc Moore, a lineworker for Lakeland Electric, who died while on the job in 2002.

FPUAnet Fiber Internet Reaches 1,500 Parcels in Fort Pierce, and Growing

FPUAnet Communications, a division of Fort Pierce Utilities Authority (FPUA), announced that it has expanded its fiber internet service to more than 1,500 parcels in Fort Pierce. This progress represents FPUA's commitment to bringing affordable, high-speed internet options to Fort Pierce — freeing up customers to choose their internet provider based on what's important to them.

Fiber-to-the-parcel internet is the fastest and most advanced, reliable internet technology available, and FPUAnet now reaches over 1,500 parcels, covering both residential and commercial customers, in Fort Pierce. FPUA is offering fiber internet at affordable prices and with no data caps or overage fees so that everyone in Fort Pierce can enjoy the benefits of this amazing technology.

FPUAnet Communications offers fiber internet plans starting at \$49 per month for residential customers and \$99 per month for commercial customers. All fiber internet plans include speeds of at least 100 Mbps, with speeds up to 1 Gbps available. FPUAnet also offers enterprise services with speeds up to 10 Gbps.



KUA, FMPA Named Winner of 2023 Central Florida Top Workplaces Award by Orlando Sentinel

Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA) and the Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA) both received a 2023 Top Workplaces award by the Orlando Sentinel's Top Workplaces program. The

list includes companies from 10 Central Florida counties and is based solely on employee feedback gathered through a thirdparty survey administered by employee engagement technology partner Energage LLC.

The confidential survey uniquely measured 15 culture drivers that are critical to the success of any organization, including engagement, empowerment, value, respect and support. KUA and FMPA staff members were officially recognized during a recent awards luncheon.



Orlando Utilities Commission Fuels Greener Grid with New Battery Storage System



The Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) recently installed a 4-megawatt (MW)/8-megawatt-hour (MWh) battery energy storage system in St. Cloud. The project will increase grid resiliency and help achieve the utility's 2050 Net Zero CO2 emissions goals.

Supplied by renewable energy company Ameresco, the battery energy storage system (BESS) stores excess energy from solar and other generation to provide power during periods of low solar generation — such as during a storm or on a cloudy day — as well as during times when electric demand is high but solar may not be available (early morning, late afternoon or evening). This ensures grid resiliency regardless of weather conditions.

OUC and Ameresco worked in October to install BESS, which will be divided into two 2-megawatt systems on-site — each comparable in size to a shipping container and weighing 75 tons apiece. The battery system will be installed using a crane at OUC's St. Cloud Substation in Osceola County.

Expected to be fully operational by mid-January, the new battery storage systems will enable a more seamless and efficient integration of solar energy into OUC's grid.

OUC's Electric Integrated Resource Plan calls for ending the use of coal no later than 2027 and sets the utility on a course to reach net zero CO2 emissions by 2050, with interim target carbon reductions of 50 percent by 2030 and 75 percent by 2040. The St. Cloud Substation Battery project is the latest of several clean energy milestones for OUC this year. In January, the utility celebrated its "topping out" on the first net zero energy corporate campus to be built for a Florida utility, named the St. Cloud Operations & Maintenance Center, which will open in early 2024, followed by the July opening of the Robinson ReCharge Mobility Hub (see above).

JEA Climbs High at the International Lineworkers Rodeo in Kansas

Congratulations to team JEA for their achievement at the International Lineworkers Rodeo held in Kansas in October! At



the rodeo, JEA apprentices competed in hurtman rescue, pole climb, two mystery events and a written test, showcasing their speed, accuracy, agility and knowledge. Events like this rodeo allow public power lineworkers to compete among the best of the best. They learn skills and improve safe work practices that benefit all Florida public power communities.

Ryan Kornegay, a JEA apprentice, achieved second place in the Overall Apprentice for a municipal category and fifth place in Mystery Event No. 2. Additionally, JEA apprentice Auston LaFavor placed first in Mystery Event No. 1, and JEA apprentice Payton Thompson placed fifth in the Pole Climb event.

Veteran linemen Scott LaFavor coached, and Rocky Waldroup, Nick Stafford and Chip Crews judged this year's competition.

Lakeland Electric Wins at iConnect 2023



Lakeland Electric stole the show at KUBRA's iConnect 2023 annual client conference when they clinched the highly coveted Illuminating Innovation Award. Dallas Ward and Casidy Deeson took center stage, graciously accepting the award on behalf of Lakeland Electric. A huge round of applause goes out to the Sheila Alfaro and the unsung heroes behind the scenes at KUBRA and Lakeland Electric, who worked tirelessly to make this groundbreaking achievement possible.

KUBRA is an industry-leading provider of customer experience management solutions to some of the largest utility, government and insurance entities in North America.

US Department of Energy Selects FPUA, Lake Worth Beach for Federal Funding

On October 18, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced it selected Florida public power utilities Fort Pierce Utilities Authority (FPUA) and the City of Lake Worth Beach to receive nearly \$30 million combined in federal funding to strengthen electric grid resilience and reliability.

The funds are part of the Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships (GRIP) Program, which seeks to enhance grid flexibility and improve the resilience of the power system against growing threats of extreme weather and climate change. Funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and administered by DOE's Grid Deployment Office, the GRIP Program leverages federal and private investments to ensure that communities across the nation have a reliable grid that's prepared for extreme weather while also delivering affordable, clean energy and creating robust local opportunities for economic investment and jobs.

FPUA will receive \$5,828,993 to enhance and modernize the Fort Pierce electric grid. The funds will advance FPUA's broader initiative to storm-harden and modernize the electric grid, ensuring grid reliability and quality of service for their customers.

Key features of FPUA's grant-funded project include:

- Upgrade two critical substation transformers to accommodate growing electric demand.
- Replace four distribution transformers for modernization.
- Upgrade a major substation to ring bus configuration for modernization and automation.
- Install 400 mounted reclosers to reduce outage frequency and duration.

The City of Lake Worth Beach will receive \$23,462,167 for its System Hardening & Reliability Improvement Program (SHRIP). The funds will enhance reliability through infrastructure investments that will transform the city's electrical grid and reduce vulnerability to weather events. Specifically, the city will install more than 60 reclosers and other sectionalizing devices to autonomously rebalance the electrical system, integrate battery energy storage (BES) for community solar, establish new fiber-optics connections, install advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) and deploy a meter data management (MDM) system. These benefits will lead to fewer outages, rapid restoration, improved grid planning for future needs and more.

Congratulations to FPUA and Lake Worth Beach on successfully securing millions for infrastructure improvements.

On the Move

Who's Who in the Florida Public Power Community

Gainesville Regional Utility Authority Board Members Named, Hold First Meeting

Gov. Ron DeSantis in late September and early October announced the appointment of James Coats IV, Robert Karow, Eric Lawson and Craig Carter to the Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) Authority, effective October 1, 2023.

James Coats IV is the CEO of Phalanx Defense Systems. He serves as a member of the Golden Key International Honor Society and was awarded the "Spirit of Gainesville" Award by the Alachua County Chamber of Commerce.

Robert Karow is currently retired, previously serving as the manager, legal counsel and contracts manager for Oleoductos de Crudos Pesados. He is a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel. Karow has more than 40 years of energy experience, with an emphasis in oil and natural gas, pipelines, facilities and power generation.

Eric Lawson is the CEO of HCA North Florida Regional Hospital. Holding multiple executive leadership positions in hospitals over the past 30 years, he most recently served as the division chief financial officer for HCA TriStar.

A former Gainesville commissioner, Craig Carter is a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Commercial M.M. Parrish Realtors. Carter is a member of the Gainesville Rotary Club and vice chair of the Gainesville Regional Airport Authority. The independent, governor-appointed GRU Authority Board, established in HB 1645 by the 2023 Florida Legislature, met for the first time on October 4, 2023. During the first meeting, Carter was elected chair and Coats was elected vice chair of the Board.



Tallahassee Mayor Selected to Participate in Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative

Mayor John Dailey

has been selected to participate in the seventh class of the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, joining an accomplished set of 40 mayors and 80 senior municipal leaders who will participate in the yearlong professional management training program.

Established by Bloomberg Philanthropies, Harvard Kennedy School and Harvard Business School, the program equips city leaders with the tools and expertise to expand their problem-solving capacity, strengthen their city halls and improve outcomes for residents.

The Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative brings together Harvard faculty, staff and students, alongside experts from Bloomberg Philanthropies' global network, to work with the mayors and senior officials over the course of one year. Through a combination of intensive classroom, virtual and field-based lessons and offerings, the initiative helps these leaders bolster their teams' use of data and evidence, drive collaboration and innovation across sectors and deliver impact for communities. To kick off their participation, Dailey was one of the 40 mayors who joined Harvard faculty and renowned management leaders in New York City in July for a four-day immersive classroom experience. Also participating in the program are Assistant City Managers Abena Ojetayo and Christian Doolin.

City of Newberry Leaders Graduate from the Certified Public Manager Program



The City of Newberry proudly announced that six leaders have successfully graduated from the nationally recognized Certified Public Manager (CPM) program at Florida State University's Center for Public Management. These six leaders have shown exemplary commitment to serving our city and furthering their skills in public management. The CPM program is a nationally recognized comprehensive management development program that provides participants with an in-depth understanding of the principles, practices and issues of professional public management.

Newberry's CPM graduates are: Jamie Jones, assistant city manager for public works and utilities; Dallas Lee, assistant city manager and chief financial officer; Travis Parker, director of parks, recreation and facilities; Judy Rice, city clerk; Tammy Snyder, customer service manager; and Bryan Thomas, director of planning and economic development.

Please join us in congratulating these exceptional public servants on their noteworthy achievements.

JEA's Jay Stowe, 2023 Ultimate CEO Honoree



Congratulations to JEA Managing Director and CEO Jay Stowe for being named a 2023 Ultimate CEO honoree by the *Jacksonville*

Business Journal.

For more than a decade, the Jacksonville Business Journal has celebrated some of the men and women whose stewardship of their organizations, community involvement and overall leadership has helped shape the First Coast and its economy.

This year, the Ultimate CEO award was bestowed on 25 individuals who have led their companies to success through times of challenge and of growth. Selected by the *Business Journal* with the input of local business leaders, these honorees stand as an example of leadership in the Jacksonville area.

Honorees, who had to have been in their role for at least a year, demonstrate organizational leadership, community engagement and other attributes that are helping create the Jacksonville of the future.

Join us in celebrating Stowe for helping create the First Coast of the future.

Fort Pierce's Tennant Earns Juris Doctor Degree

Rachel Tennant, public affairs and sustainability manager for Fort Pierce

Utilities Authority (FPUA), recently graduated from the Mitchell Hamline School of Law with her Juris Doctor degree. Tennant pursued her law degree while working full time with the utility. Tennant has served in her capacity at FPUA since February 2022 and has been instrumental in helping the utility secure a number of state and federal grants (see details on the GRIP grant on page 13) totaling millions of dollars, to further the utility. Congratulations to the new attorney!

KUA's Adriana Seda Receives Master's Degree



Congratulations! The Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA) recently recognized Adriana Seda, communications specialist in KUA's Corporate Communications division, for receiving her master's degree in communication management with a concentration in strategic and organizational communications from the University of Southern California.

KUA's Mattern Receives Resolution

The Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA) recently presented Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA) Vice President of Operations Larry Mattern with a



resolution honoring his 40 years of service in power operations. He represented KUA on FMPA's Board of Directors for 16 years, including five terms as secretary. Mattern also served on FMPA's Executive Committee for 12 years, and he was a key leader and contributor in the All-Requirements Power Supply Project. Thank you to Mattern for his service to Florida public power!

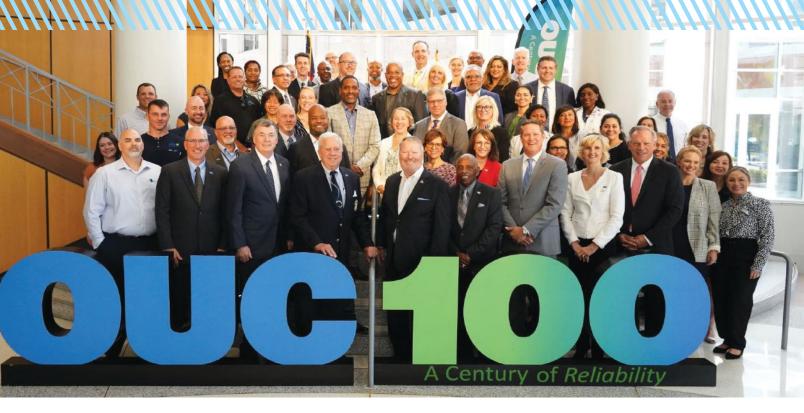
City of Tallahassee Upgrades Customer Operations Organization

The City of Tallahassee recently announced the promotion of Rhonda Reaves-Smith and Thomas "T.J." Carlisle to assistant directors. In its announcement, the city notes that both Reaves-Smith and Carlisle have demonstrated their leadership and the necessary skill sets to carry Tallahassee to the next level of service.

The city recently completed upgrading of its 20-year-old customer information system, PeopleSoft. In addition, it has upgraded its interactive voice response (IVR); launched voice biometrics; started chat sessions on its app, Talgov; begun using a new payment provider, Paymentus; and will very soon be moving phone systems to the cloud.

The City of Tallahassee commits to continue embracing new technology to allow customers to engage with them in a fashion that meets customers' preferences. Parking ambassadorship, electric vehicles, solar and other advances have created a need for Tallahassee to restructure its customer operations. The new business lines will now assist the city in meeting business objectives while controlling operational costs. Tallahassee is taking these actions proactively in adapting to the market with new products and processes.

It is for these reasons that we join Tallahassee in welcoming Reaves-Smith and Carlisle to their new roles.



THREE FMEA MEMBERS MARK **MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES**

Within the last two years, three FMEA members marked milestone anniversaries either 100 or 125 years of service. We visited with the representatives of those Florida public power communities to learn about their future as well as their past and present.

City of Wauchula

A century ago, those attending summertime religious services in Wauchula were a sweaty mess. That's because the south-central Florida community did not have electric service on Sundays. Some parts of the city also lacked electric service in the overnight hours.

That all changed shortly after the City of Wauchula acquired the electric utility in 1922.

The community-owned utility marked its centennial in May 2022 in grand style, with a huge birthday cake for the whole community and a brick-laying ceremony.



Located 90 minutes east of the beaches at Bradenton, Wauchula works hard to preserve its "Florida the way it used to be" feel, said City Manager Olivia Minshew. "If you want to

escape the hustle and bustle of the city, you can come here and relax in a slower-paced, gorgeous, rural community." She said there has been an increase in ecotourism lately.

1922 HECTRIC CENTERNA A OF 1923 HECTRIC CENTERNA A OF 1923 HECTRIC CENTERNA A OF 1923 HECTRIC CENTERNA A OF 1924 HECTRIC CENTERNA

A century ago, Minshew said, the Wauchula economy was dominated by the three C's: cucumbers.

citrus and cattle. Agriculture and momand-pop businesses still provide character to the community, but phosphate mining has become a large component of economic growth.

In 2021, the utility's eight lineworkers erected a 50-foot Christmas "tree" fashioned out of a utility pole in the newly renovated Crews Park, then decorated it with strings of lights and tinsel, she said. This year, the display will be expanded to five "trees."

The utility's workers care deeply about serving their community, Minshew said. "We are neighbors serving neighbors," adding that the utility's lineworkers also hung Christmas lights in two neighboring towns.

Minshew said the utility, which serves about 2,900 customers, has replaced both transformers at its sole substation since 2007. Both were more than 50 years old. The newer equipment, plus more aggressive tree trimming, has helped boost electric reliability.

The city manager laughed when asked what was in store for the next quarter century. "I am eligible to retire in 11 years, and while I really enjoy my work, I will leave that to someone else."

But Minshew said the utility will continue to gather more data on the health of its distribution system by extending its supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system, which today only monitors transmission. In the 2024-2025 period, the utility plans to deploy an advanced metering infrastructure (AMI), which will further boost service quality.



Ocala Electric Utility

In 1898, the same year Teddy Roosevelt and his "Rough Riders" were charging around in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, the Ocala Electric Utility (OEU) was taking shape.

Back then, Ocala had about 2,500 inhabitants. In 1898, the City of Ocala

purchased the existing Ocala Light & Power utility for \$14,500, a small fraction of what it would be today.

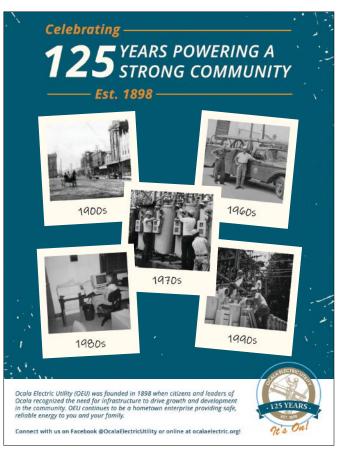
It took a little over a decade for peak electric demand to reach 0.5 megawatts. OEU built its first power plant in 1916, a generator that provided electricity to about 600 customers.

Today, OEU serves more than 54,000 homes and businesses across a 160-squaremile territory in the City of Ocala and Marion County with a network of 21 substations, 1,202 miles of power lines and 47,786 power poles. It purchases all of its power from the Florida Municipal Power Agency.

Like other FMEA members, OEU Director Doug Peebles and his deputy, Chad Lynch, are proud that OEU is delivering on its mission to provide dependable, cost-effective and secure power to its customers. This dedication to service is evident in the utility's unwavering support of the community's current and former employees, customers and leadership.

"OEU strives to create a sustainable future while delivering customer-centric service to our community. Working closely with customers and community leaders, we ensure that our utility reflects the longterm goals and needs of the community," Peebles continued.

OEU's term for that is C.A.R.E. (Communities Are the Responsibility of Everyone), a commitment to make the community's needs and concerns





the utility's needs and concerns. It connects employees with programs, projects and

serving the needs of and making a difference within the community. OEU supports local nonprofit organizations that project a positive image and advance a public purpose such as promotion of public health, safety, education, environmental, economic and/or youth development programs.

On July 14, 2023, the utility convened a "Success Through Time" event at the Ocala Downtown Square to mark its 125th anniversary. The event started with a Chamber of Commerce and Economic Partnership ribbon-cutting to recognize OEU for its commitment to excellence and customer service as a hometown public power provider. Mayor Kent Guinn delivered a proclamation, and attendees participated in educational booths and bucket truck rides. The event featured family entertainment such as live music, a local artist, face painting, balloon art and frozen treats.

The utility showcased its 125th year of service with a large timeline display in its Customer Service Office in downtown Ocala. A special logo recognizing OEU's 125 years of service was created and displayed on event banners as well as advertising and marketing collateral.



Peebles commented, "As your locally owned and operated utility, we have proudly served the City of Ocala and surrounding Marion County for 125 years. Our mission then, remains our mission now: to provide safe, reliable and lowcost power to you and your family."

Looking forward, Peebles said, "OEU is committed to exceeding our customers' expectations. Our commitment to quality and outstanding service in a continually changing environment will accomplish this mission. OEU continues to be a hometown enterprise providing safe, reliable energy to our community. "We are deeply grateful to our current and former employees, customers and community leaders for sharing in Ocala Electric Utility's rich history since 1898. We look forward to the next 125 years."

OUC (Orlando Utilities Commission)

"Less than one-half of 1 percent of companies in the U.S. make it to their 100th birthday," observed Jenise Osani, OUC's vice president of marketing and new products. "The fact that we did is a testament to our ability to grow with our community, while also evolving and supporting its needs."

One way OUC marked its centennial was through a February 2023 golf tournament where \$100,000 was raised to support the local community. Ten local charities benefited from the event — which is fitting for a community-owned utility.

OUC also created a new tagline for its corporate logo, "A Century of Reliability," which is replacing its long-standing tagline, "The Reliable One," during the utility's centennial. The utility plans to return to its "The Reliable One" tagline after the centennial is completed.

Osani said OUC took a multifaceted approach to the centennial: "It's not about us, it's about the people we serve. During this time, our emphasis has been on supporting our customers through assistance funds and programs while also sharing stories about employees and OUC's contributions to our community."

OUC has grown dramatically over the last century alongside its community. Today, the utility provides electricity to more than 270,000 customers, roughly 100 times the initial 2,795 customers that were the first to receive service from OUC's lone generator, a 100-kilowatt, 150-horsepower steam engine. Today, OUC also provides water service to more than 130,000 customers, up from about 2,290 in 1923.

In October 2023, the utility hosted an OUC100 Legacy Luncheon where local elected officials, utility commissioners past and present, and General Manager and CEO Clint Bullock reflected on the past, present and future of both the utility and community. Additionally, Shawn Welcome, City of Orlando poet laureate, penned an ode to Orlando.

FMEA Executive Director Amy Zubaly joined the city and OUC for the community luncheon. She said, "It's always such an honor to be able to celebrate legacy milestones with the community served by one of our member utilities. It's clear that OUC is the heartbeat of a thriving Orlando community, leaving an indelible mark in the city's history, and its legacy of reliability and excellence in service will be reflected throughout the next century."

The utility's centennial activities were directed by a diverse group of employees, which Osani said deepened their commitment to OUC. "The way our team marked our centennial makes me so proud," she said.

At the October event to highlight OUC's centennial, Bullock reflected on what has changed over the years and what has not.

What has not changed is OUC's commitment to our community, he said. "The most important element of our culture is that reliability is the common thread in every employee's experience, no matter what department they worked."

To prepare for the October event, OUC connected with current and former employees and leaders who played major roles in memorable and pivotal chapters throughout the utility's history. Their stories were used to create a video about the utility's legacy and employees. A link to a digital history book, which looks at accomplishments over the past century, was distributed to attendees at the lunchtime event.

Bullock, whose father was an OUC lineworker for 30 years, took a moment to look back: "In 1923, the film industry was booming, and Orlandoans caught the latest silent movies inside the Beacham Theatre while a pipe organ played. No one could have predicted that today we would have smaller versions of the silver screen in our homes and something called the Internet that allows us to stream the latest blockbusters from the comfort of our own couches! Today, OUC reliably powers the routers and networks that keep those streams flowing.

"As networks expand into the utility space, transforming the energy system into a more sustainable, highly digitized and dynamic energy cloud, OUC has an opportunity to activate dynamic, customercentric platforms such as Building-to-Grid, Transportation-to-Grid and Smart Cities. Being part of the transformation from traditional, centralized production and transmission models to the distributed energy cloud is where OUC can excel as an innovative solutions provider and the partner of choice. With digitization, there is great opportunity, but also a greater risk.

"A century ago," he continued, "hurricanes and afternoon storms were the largest threats to disrupting services to our customers. And while those are still a concern, no one could have predicted that our greatest threats today are from individuals in far reaches of the globe wielding computers — which also would never have been imagined by our predecessors — intended to wreak havoc with cyber threats."





Bullock continued: "While much has changed between 1923 and 2023, one thing that has not is the existence of challenges. And what we have in common with our founding commissioners is that we cannot predict what those challenges will be or what will be required of us to overcome them.

"But what we can predict is that when we work as a connected, committed team — every specialist, technician, engineer, innovator and leader, and each and every one of you — anything is possible and there is no challenge we can't solve."

OUC currently operates a 4-megawatt battery energy storage system, and it is investigating other leading-edge energy technologies such as small modular nuclear reactors, hydrogen, battery energy storage and flywheels. It sees a future of more solar, more microgrids and more digitization.

Looking ahead, Bullock said energy and water industries "are on the cusp of a

revolution that will usher in an era of innovation with the potential to change the world. With a number of firsts to our name, OUC's commitment to innovation has propelled Central Florida forward and will continue to fuel the next century through adaptive, responsive solutions that are advanced by the collaborative ingenuity of dedicated people. Our people deliver OUC's mission and drive our vision to be an innovative solutions leader and the partner of choice."

Whatever the specifics of their founding and their current circumstances, these three public power communities share a common bond with nearly three dozen Florida public power communities and more than 2,000 public power utilities across the nation. Public power utilities were born because nearby shareholderowned utilities could not or would not serve their communities. Looking toward the future, local control and neighbors helping neighbors will remain values shared by all public power utilities.

JEA'S JOURNEY HOME

by John Egan

JEA is three years into a remarkable transformation. When the utility's then-leadership tried to privatize it in 2018, employees could have checked out. Instead, they dug in, rallying around each other and the organization's longtime mission to serve. The effort to privatize JEA came crashing down in 2020. Under the direction of a new leadership team, the venerable community-owned utility is returning to its roots of service.

The saying that "Culture eats strategy for breakfast" is often heard when an organization is trying to transform itself. Jacksonville is the latest place where that adage is being demonstrated, as JEA's employees and leaders mark their third year of an effort to recapture the founding spirit of a community-owned utility.

That effort was made necessary because, in 2018, a different CEO and board of directors tried to privatize JEA, stunning the community and angering employees. That effort collapsed in 2020, and a new leadership team and board were put in place. Openness and transparency are elements of the secret sauce being used by the new leaders to recapture the spirit of service at the 128-year-old community-owned utility.

JEA Before the

Privatization Attempt

To learn more about JEA

before, during and after

the privatization effort,

members of the leader

ship team: Jay Stowe,

managing director and

"Raye" Curry Marshall,

and Sheila Pressley,

chief operating officer;

chief customer officer.

We also interviewed two

CEO since 2020; Raynetta

we interviewed three





Raye Marshall



Sheila Pressley





Bridgette Hardwick

and they trusted the leadership team. It really was a family environment."

Franco, an 8.5-year veteran of the utility, agreed, adding, "When I joined JEA in 2014, it invested in my onboarding, in my success. Leaders were developed organically from within. Employees were very knowledgeable. I was very impressed with JEA's culture."

Pressley, a 20-year veteran of JEA and the only member of the leadership

longtime employees — Eliana Franco, a senior account manager for commercial and industrial customers, and Bridgette Hardwick, a customer contact manager — both of whom started working at JEA before the privatization effort began in 2018.

Before the privatization effort, Franco and Hardwick agreed, JEA was a very good place to work.

Hardwick, who joined

JEA in 2005, recalled, "JEA

had been a great place

to work. It valued safety

ees cared for each other

and service, employ

team who worked at the utility before, during and after the privatization effort, added this: "Prior to the effort to sell JEA, there was no real separation between leadership and employees. Everyone worked together to serve our customers and community.

"And although the leadership team may have changed, the vision remained the same. There was some consistency; employees, customers and the community knew what to expect from JEA. The employees got to know each other, and they built firm and longstanding ties. It was like having a second family."

JEA During the Privatization Attempt

That all changed in 2018, when Aaron Zahn became CEO.

"There was a lot of drama," said Franco about the 2018-2020 period, when Zahn was attempting to sell JEA in a plan that included bonuses that could have paid out hundreds of millions of dollars to JEA leaders. "Transparency disappeared, sharp changes were announced with little or no warning. Employees started to feel blindsided by leaders. So did the community. There was a feeling that the new team could not be trusted."

Franco said, "I have a customer-facing position and my customers were asking me about the sale and how it could affect their business."

AND INTO THE FUTURE

"It was a bit scary," Hardwick said of the privatization period. "Employees who were away for a week weren't sure what might have changed during their absence."

Employees could have fled the utility, or have stayed, but just gone through the motions. Neither happened. Instead, the employees "leaned on each other heavily for support," said Pressley. "The longevity of the workforce gave it stability. The shared passion for service kept employees from checking out emotionally. Instead, they dug in and resisted."

Employees were united that JEA should not be sold. The unions representing JEA's hourly employees had red T-shirts made up that said, "JEA is Ours." Employees wearing those shirts crowded into city council meetings. Bumper stickers proclaiming that "JEA IS NOT FOR SALE" started adorning vehicles in the employee parking lot.

Their shared view that JEA should not be privatized served to unite employees more strongly. It kept employee commitment from nose-diving.

JEA: The Path Forward

Eventually, pro-privatization Zahn and the board were replaced. A former JEA CEO, who had led the utility before Zahn, brought much-needed stability to the utility by returning on an interim basis while a newly appointed board oversaw the selection of a new CEO. That was Jay Stowe, a 25-year veteran of the utility business, who joined JEA in November 2020.

As he was hiring his leadership team (which included Pressley), Stowe understood the importance of reestablishing trust with employees. On his first day, he answered questions from employees on a 90-minute livestream videocast.



"We had never done that before, but it was important to speak with as many employees as possible at once, and as early as possible," Stowe said. The video was archived so employees who could not participate during the livestream could access it afterward.

Reaching out was a critical first step to restoring employee confidence in the utility's leadership. And Stowe has continued that with a weekly update he sends each Friday. He purposely does not run his draft emails by the communications department, which helps keep it fresh and authentic.

"Y'all it is hot," Stowe wrote in his August 11, 2023, update. "We are nearing our peak load from last year each day — and really surprisingly close to our all-time summer peak load, within 100 Megawatts or so. That means bills will be higher this month than they have been. Our Communications Team is working on a couple of digital ads to help people know that we are working to keep rates down, but that with the hot weather customers might see higher bills. Trying to be open and transparent about the cost is important."

He continued: "I am excited about all the work we are doing — but there is an ongoing concern about supply chain and delivery of larger three-phase transformers. We had been focused on smaller transformers for a while — and that is not great yet, but the three-phase transformers are so slow in coming in, we may have some large commercial developments that are delayed because we do not have the transformers to connect them to the grid. It is a big problem nationally, and it may cause us problems locally."

Stowe is not a CEO who thinks he should only communicate with employees when he has some earth-shattering insights. A number of retirees have asked to receive his updates, and they have been added to the distribution list.

Since Stowe's arrival, JEA has reengaged with FMEA and the American Public Power Association (APPA). As well, he has overseen an intentional effort to reconnect the utility with the community. Marshall said, "Jay walks the walk. It's an old saying, but it's true. He has brought an amazing amount of openness and accessibility to the C-Suite. People really want to read his Friday weekly updates. He writes them even when he's on vacation!"

Every month or two, the leadership team holds an unscripted webcast where all employees are invited and no topic is off-limits. By watching how their leaders respond to questions, employees as well as mid-level managers have a chance to see and hear directly from top officials about their issues of concern. Marshall, Pressley, Franco and Hardwick agreed that employees are now more aligned with their leaders. It may sound like a stretch, but by making themselves available and communicating regularly with employees, JEA's leadership team has gone a long way to restore trust with them.

Many utilities, JEA included, start meetings with a safety minute. Stowe has built on that tradition but replaced the "safety moment" with a "values moment," where attendees can share stories about JEA officials putting its three core values — safety, respect and integrity — into action.

Marshall pointed out, "When we say 'safety,' it's not only physical, it's also employees' emotional and mental well-being. The whole definition has been expanded."

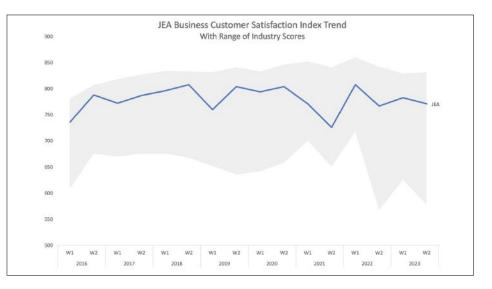
Franco said, "By sharing what's on their minds, and making themselves available to employees, the leadership team passed the employee trust test with flying colors. What we see and hear is what we get."

JEA's IRP Process

Stowe said he doesn't follow any of the turnaround cookbooks from management gurus or consulting firms. He wants to err on the side of openness and communicates frequently and authentically. In his communications, he said that while words are important, deeds are even more important.

As an example, at Stowe's suggestion, JEA for the first time invited members of the public to participate in stakeholder workshops to develop an electric integrated resource plan (IRP). Twentytwo external stakeholders participated in eight IRP workshops over an 18-month period.

The resulting product is better because of the broader participation, agreed Stowe, Pressley and Marshall. Not all stakeholders got everything they wanted, the CEO said,



but the outreach gave the process and resulting product more legitimacy.

For example, some members of the IRP group wanted JEA to commit to aggressive decarbonization goals, such as becoming carbon-free by 2050. The utility did not adopt that specific goal, in part because Stowe felt it would be disingenuous to commit to a goal when the technologies necessary to deliver it timely were not commercially available.

But the utility is continuing to decarbonize. The IRP committed JEA to using 100 percent carbon-free electricity for its facilities by 2030 and 35 percent clean energy in its overall power supply portfolio.

Acting on the shared view that a community-owned utility needs to be deeply rooted to its community, the leadership team has spent more time and effort reaching out to the community. They have held numerous community meetings and engaged with media partners to discuss the IRP process and goals. JEA has also been more actively involved in local economic development.

"In the past, we tended to be reactive, but now we're more proactively and continually involved in local economic development," Stowe said. "In some ways, community-owned utilities really are economic development organizations that happen to be running a utility.

"It is absolutely not important for us to take the lead on economic development or to get credit for it, but it is important for us to work closely with other groups so the area can respond to the needs of new and existing businesses. The most important thing we can do is keep our rates affordable and be responsive to our customers."

The Importance of Employee Commitment

When leading an organizational transformation, Stowe made it clear that the leadership team needed to start by rebuilding employee trust.

"High employee engagement leads to positive results in the organization, and that's regardless of what business you happen to be in," he said. "If people care about what they're doing, if they feel committed to what they're doing, if they're serving the community, then we as an organization will be better for it and our community will also benefit.

"We spend a lot of time talking about our purpose being to improve the lives of those in Northeast Florida. If we're improving the lives of our employees and building community with those employees, if we work well together, if we treat each other well, then it becomes easier to treat our customers well. That way, everyone benefits."



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PREPARATIONS PAID OFF: WHAT FOUR SMALLER MEMBERS DID BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER HURRICANE IDALIA

by John Egan

The boxer Mike Tyson once said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face." Although Hurricane Idalia turned out the lights for an estimated 300,000 Floridians when it hit on August 30 as a fast-moving Category 3 storm, Idalia largely spared Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) members. And several of them, after restoring their own public power communities, even provided mutual aid to electric cooperatives that had been punched in the face by the storm. *RELAY* spoke with four of FMEA's smaller members about their preparation for Hurricane Idalia, how lessons from prior storms affected their preparation for Idalia, and the lessons learned from Idalia that will be applied to future storm preparation. All four utility leaders praised FMEA for its role in coordinating the flow of equipment, communications and personnel to expedite the restoration of power. And two of them discussed what they saw when they helped neighboring communities in need.

City of Starke Utilities

Starke was one of two smaller FMEA members that sent a mutual aid crew to help restore power in communities served by electric cooperatives. In Starke's case, that was Central Florida Electric Cooperative (CFEC) and Suwannee Valley Electric Cooperative (Suwannee).

"This was our first time sending significant mutual aid to another community," said Drew Mullins, Starke's city manager. "We jumped right on it after we had our outages restored. It just comes down to neighbors helping neighbors."

A six-person crew from Starke spent five days helping restore power for CFEC, and another seven helping Suwannee, which lost power to 100 percent of its 28,000 members.

"Overall, I heard there were about 1,400 mutual aid workers at Suwannee and 700 at CFEC," said Stevie Warren, Starke's line supervisor. "They first estimated that it could take up to six weeks to restore all power, but within 10 days, everyone was back on in both cooperatives."

"In Horseshoe Beach, which is served by CFEC, about 60 percent to 70 percent of the homes were destroyed by the storm surge," Mullins told *RELAY* magazine. "But it was amazing to see the community's response. People set up tents and began cooking food, and they gave it to anyone who needed it. That was a hard-hit area where the community came together to help each other. I am thankful the City of Starke was in a position to help. And people were really thrilled that Starke Utilities was helping restore their power." Starke is located about two hours away from Horseshoe Beach.

"At Suwannee," added Warren, "people were really over the top that they had not been forgotten, because they were really out there in the woods."

"It was good to see municipal utilities helping cooperatives," Mullins said. "Next



time, the shoe might be on the other foot. Being a member of FMEA and FMPA allows us to build relationships across the state to help in times of need. We never know when we may need help ourselves."

Warren said his lineworkers' experience was critical to getting the lights back on, both in their community and the communities served by the electric cooperatives.

Warren, who came to Starke after 30 years as a lineworker with Clay Electric Cooperative, has one foreman with 38 years of experience. One of Starke's lineworkers has 45 years of experience. Other members of his crew have 20 years of experience or 10 years of experience, and several have five or six years of experience. There is one apprentice who is still learning the trade.

"You can't teach experience," Warren said. "We try to hire, train and build a good team. I would not trade my crew for another. I'd put them alongside any other crew."

City Manager Mullins said several lessons learned from previous years helped prepare the city for a storm that, for Starke, never did much damage.



"In the last few years, we have really ramped up tree trimming to increase clearance from the power lines, hired experienced employees and provided ample training opportunities. That really can make a difference, not only during a storm, but also in daily operations."

During Idalia, around 150 Starke customers experienced outages. All of the outages were restored within a day.

Starke also deployed 11 portable generators the day before the storm hit to keep traffic lights working. They have done that for the last few years, ever since they were able to purchase the generators. Backup generators also were deployed on some of the city's water lift stations and water treatment plants, to ensure continuity of operations if power was lost.

Mullins said the utility also stockpiled plenty of materials, such as fuel, poles, electric lines and transformers, again a lesson learned from earlier storm restoration. "Transformers are a little harder to stockpile due to the industry's shortage, but being a member of FMEA and FMPA allows the city to quickly ask other members if they have equipment or materials that could be loaned or swapped if needed."

City of Newberry

"We caught a lucky break with Idalia," said Jamie Jones, assistant city manager and director of utilities and public works for the City of Newberry. "Early projections were that the storm would pass right through our city." Fortunately for Newberry, the storm took a hard turn north and mostly missed the city.

Newberry did sustain some power outages: A peak of about 481 customers lost power during the storm, nearly 20 percent of the city's 2,600 electric customers. It took about four hours to restore power to all customers, Jones said.

He said deployment of two advanced technologies — an advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) and a customer-facing app called "SeeClickFix" — helped expedite power restoration.

"Our AMI system helped us pinpoint outages and speed up restoration," Jones said.

The SeeClickFix app, which the city deployed in 2021 and renamed "Newberry Connect,"



enabled citizens to snap a photo where a downed tree was on a power line, or another priority issue that required the city's attention, and to send it directly to the city, where it was instantly inserted into the workflow system.

Hurricane Idalia was the first time the Newberry Connect app was used for citizens' storm reporting. Jones estimated that the use of the app cut down the city's storm assessment time by about 50 percent, and cut as much as 70 percent off its Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) documentation time for storm restoration.

"FEMA is a wonderful federal agency, but it loves to stack paper when there is a declared event. It could take months or years to perfect an application for reimbursement after a declared event like a hurricane."

Two Alabama municipal utilities mobilized two-person mutual aid crews from the City of Dothan Utilities and the City of Sheffield to help Newberry. After being released from Newberry, the Alabama crews deployed to help other harder-hit areas.

Like Starke Utilities, Newberry sent mutual aid crews to Florida electric cooperatives: CFEC and Clay Electric Cooperative. "While it's not every day that a municipal utility will send mutual aid to a cooperative, we have a good



working relationship with CFEC and are likely to do it again. Or they could help us."

Jones was grateful that FMEA facilitated the potential sharing of scarce equipment like transformers and poles from larger utilities that had bigger stockpiles in case they were needed for this restoration.

He said the utility's staff experience and preparation were critical ingredients for any successful storm restoration. "Experience is invaluable in a storm restoration," he said, adding that "the best experience is learning from your mistakes."

The utility conducts pole inspections on a year-round basis, replacing those that have been compromised. It also stockpiles fuel and materials before a storm hits. Thirdly, it makes sure employees know their roles during a restoration.

Every year, Newberry adds a fixed-mount generator to critical locations, such as lift stations, in case there is an extended power outage.

It also made sure City Hall and the utility building had backup generators with fuel to ensure its systems, such as supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) and AMI, had juice in case there was a power outage.

Jones said the city had a "tremendous increase," as much as 50 percent, in the amount



of outbound customer communications compared to earlier years. Most of this added communication was made using social media platforms and the utility's website.

Sometimes the content of those communications shared common-sense messages, like directing customers to not put tree branches or other debris in the road because that could impede the power restoration work of utility crews. Other communications alerted customers to the availability of sandbags from the utility. Proactive communication decreased the number of outage calls coming into the utility, Jones said.

He said the city, and his crews, received positive customer feedback, mostly through social media but also sometimes by people who thanked them in the field.

Jones said his major concern prior to Idalia was the ability to have enough power restoration materials on hand should there be widespread outages. But he said FMEA alleviated that by contacting larger members and having them potentially share materials from their stock with smaller utilities.

"FMEA was a tremendous help before, during and after Idalia," he said. "They had numerous daily outage briefings for members, coordinated mutual aid, arranged for potential transfer of some materials among the members and acted as a vital conduit of information among the members. They were awesome!"

City of Williston

Terry Bovaird became city manager of Williston last September, shortly before Hurricane lan laid waste to a large swath of Florida. One of his key takeaways from that storm was the need to stockpile equipment before it was needed. For Idalia, Williston was able to stockpile what it could get ordered and delivered.

Happily, that pre-positioned material was not needed after Hurricane Idalia. The outages in Williston peaked at about 300 of the utility's approximately 1,500 customers, and all outages were restored within one day. The nearby sidebar contains an edited list of the steps Williston took to prepare for Idalia.

"We also encouraged staff to prepare their homes and yards for a storm before coming into work, as they may not be able to be home for that event. Our workers are expected to be with us for the duration of the storm.

"In this part of the world," he continued, "hurricane preparation takes place for six months a year and hurricane seasons are six months a year. You are never not thinking about hurricanes. I'm a lifelong Florida resident — I've been preparing for hurricanes all my life."

Prior to joining Williston, Bovaird spent 30-plus years in law enforcement, where he gained extensive experience coordinating emergency responses to natural disasters.

Last year, Hurricane Ian also hit Williston: It lost power for about two hours after both circuits went down. It took the utility less than 24 hours to restore power to all of its customers, Bovaird said.

City of Williston Prepares for Hurricane Idalia

The City of Williston created a lengthy checklist of steps necessary to prepare for Hurricane Idalia. Compiling and updating a comprehensive list of "must do" preparatory activities can prevent little things — which could become big things, depending on the storm — from being overlooked. Here is a select excerpt of Williston's checklist for Idalia:

- Close City Hall, send all nonessential employees home, place closure notice on city's webpage.
- Cancel nonessential meetings.
- Load a map of city streets that could flood on the city webpage.
- Top off all equipment with fuel.
- Test generators.
- Open sandbag operations at 55 SE Main Street.
- Place a request through the Levy County Emergency Operations Center for three generators; update with status for each location.
 - Fugate Lift Station
 - Williston Elementary Lift Station
 - Animal shelter
- Call around for rentals on generators.
- Prepare a critical staffing plan for essential employees.
- Have airport move planes as needed per request from the owners

following designation of the airport as a Logistical Staging Area.

- Animal shelter may open for staff animals and others seeking shelter for their animals. This will be on a case-by-case basis if the animals meet the minimum medical needs.
- Obtain sandbags for City Hall.
- Request extra tarps from the Levy County Emergency
 Operations Center.
- Inform customers via Facebook that trash pickup will be pushed back to Saturday, September 2.
- Place information on our Facebook page that Williston Middle High School is opening at 5 p.m., August 29, 2023, as a shelter.
 Deploy digital message boards at Williston Middle High School with shelter information.
- The United States flag taken down at City Hall to prevent its destruction.

After Ian, Williston instituted "after action reports" detailing what worked and what didn't during the last storm, to be better prepared for future storms.

"We learned we needed to stockpile transformers and other equipment before the storm so restoration was not interrupted," Bovaird said. "Finding transformers was particularly hard after Hurricane lan, and we needed to be better prepared."

One other change Bovaird instituted after lan was having a better idea of where workers with specific skills were sleeping in the utility office during restoration. During lan, workers were sleeping wherever they could find a space. When officials went looking for an electric operator, they sometimes woke up a gas operator, he said. That didn't happen during Idalia.

Another lesson learned from lan: Book your rental power generators before you need them. This year, Bovaird rented a 225-kilowatt generator to ensure power was available for the main lift station at the city's water treatment plant. He also rented two smaller generators, 75 kilowatts each, to power smaller lift stations.

None of the generators were needed during Idalia, but Bovaird doesn't regret spending the money: "It's preferable to incurring hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage to the water infrastructure."

Though Idalia didn't impact Williston substantially, Bovaird still drew several lessons learned from Idalia that will be addressed before the next hurricane season.

During Idalia, the utility didn't have enough cots and bedding for those who were sleeping on-site. Some employees were forced to sleep in their chairs. That won't happen again, he said.

Another important takeaway: Make sure you have enough food to feed the workers. Workers were fed at City Hall, and while Bovaird said no one went hungry during Idalia, he said next year "the chow will be more and better, because you can't run down to Winn–Dixie to get more supplies during a storm."

Like others interviewed for this article, the Williston city manager had high praise for FMEA's role during the storm.

Green Cove Springs

After Idalia passed by the City of Green Cove Springs, Andy Yeager, the city's utilities director, saw something unusual: Lineworkers sitting in the dispatch area, awaiting power restoration orders.

As a precaution, the city, via FMEA, had called in a six-person mutual aid crew from the City of Andalusia, Alabama. But Yeager sent the crew home because they were not needed.

"It's pretty unusual for lineworkers to have downtime after a storm," he remarked. "During Idalia, lineworkers were sitting on pins and needles awaiting outage reports that, by and large, never came. We were hardly affected by Idalia.

"We're not complaining!" he added quickly. Less than a dozen outages were reported during Idalia, and all of those were from tree limbs touching electric wires. No wires were snapped, and all outages were restored within an hour.

Yeager shared some of his lessons learned from prior storm preparation:

- The utility pre-positioned some equipment, such as poles and wires, at a substation, rather than leaving the material in a warehouse. Getting the equipment in the field helped reduce outage restoration times.
- Prior to the storm, line crews surveyed the city's trees to see which ones needed additional trimming to prevent their coming into contact with electric equipment.
- The city operates three utilities power, water and sewer — and before the storm, workers were cross-trained in case they needed to take on other responsibilities during or after a storm.
- For about three years, Clay County has had an in-house meteorologist who could provide more granular local information

about storm conditions, to enhance restoration efforts. That might be something other counties will want to adopt.

He stressed the importance of having a plan because storms can turn on a dime.

Although Green Cove Springs didn't get hit hard by Idalia, Yeager was glad he prepared. "Prepare for the worst, hope for the best," he said.

He does worry about one aspect of Idalia: National and state officials were warning the public for several days about the potentially destructive impact of Idalia. There were devastating storm surges at Horseshoe Beach, on the Gulf Coast, where Idalia first made landfall. But for utilities farther inland like Green Cove Springs, he wondered if people would discount future storm warnings because Idalia did not cause a lot of damage. The tendency of some people to "ride out" a hurricane sometimes ends well, but sometimes not. Not all storms are like Idalia.

"You must be prepared for a storm," he said, referring to citizens as well as emergency personnel. "You can't take anything for granted." ■





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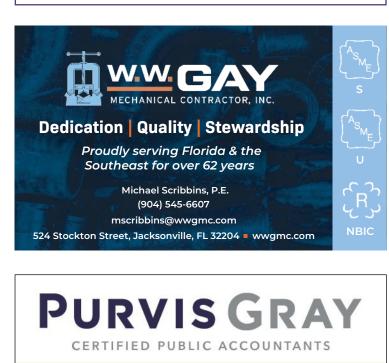
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CITY OF TALLAHASSEE: A FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT OF IDALIA PREPARATION

by Mike Crow

As an electric utility provider in Florida, the City of Tallahassee, like our other partners throughout the state, understands the potential impacts severe weather can have on our system. Beginning June 1 through the conclusion of the Atlantic hurricane season on November 30, there is a heightened awareness of our operations. We closely monitor the tropics for areas of disturbance while staying informed as the storm progresses through the development process.

Hurricane Idalia was no different. We became aware of the storm early on as a tropical depression (TD), and by August 25, TD Ten was moving over the eastern Gulf of Mexico with conditions favorable for development. Forecast models were starting to show consistency while reaching the consensus that this would be a major storm with a high degree of certainty that Florida would experience substantial impacts.

At this point, we focused on two things: first, we ensured internal staff members were familiar with their primary and secondary roles outlined in the storm plan. That familiarity is an ongoing process ingrained throughout the year through planning sessions, individual team meetings and roundtable discussions internally and statewide through the Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) and with other public power utilities. Second, we identified the need for mutual aid and determined the additional resources required for a safe and efficient restoration response. That number is often fluid as the storm intensifies and zeroes in on an area for landfall. Hurricane Idalia was not unique from that perspective, and the potential areas of impact were spread across North Florida. Because of this, we knew that mutual aid received before landfall

would likely come from outside Florida. Having learned from experience and having the resources to pre-stage crews, we made immediate contact with FMEA to gauge the availability of outside utilities to assist.

By Sunday, August 27, we were engaged in a steady line of communication with FMEA, relaying our needs while also providing a complete crew list of internal



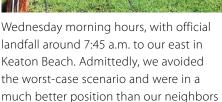
staff available for deployment if Idalia avoided impact of our service territory. At the City of Tallahassee, we view our membership with the statewide trade association, FMEA, as one of our most valuable resources, which allows us to tap into a nationwide network of utilities readily available to respond in a time of need. Ultimately, through FMEA we secured 200-plus additional line crew personnel from 23 utilities in seven states, most en route by Monday and pre-staged in our service territory ready to respond by Tuesday evening.

Throughout the day on Tuesday, August 29, weather models still showed uncertainty about the exact landfall location. Over the previous few days, Hurricane Idalia showed a steady trend to the west, putting our service territory at greater risk. At this point, it was a waiting game; with mutual aid on the way and internal staff prepped, we were prepared for the worst and confident we had adequate resources in place.

We shifted our attention to known factors surrounding the storm. Due to the steady speed and the window of arrival on Wednesday morning, we were confident that no matter the landfall location, the storm would be fast-moving, allowing restoration efforts to begin early with good daylight. We considered this a silver lining, allowing for a quick, productive response with little downtime experienced, unlike when a system is impacted by a storm at night.

Our plan was to use this to our advantage. We would be aggressive by having crews in place and dispatched to the field quickly once it was safe. That known factor led to the decision to have all staff, if safe, report to work at 6 a.m. on August 30 for a safety briefing/situational awareness meeting, then prepare to deploy and begin restoring outages. On schedule and as predicted, our system began to experience the wrath of Hurricane Idalia in the early





to the east.

At peak, our outage count exceeded 38,000, roughly 35 percent of our system, with multiple distribution and transmission circuits entirely out. Working from our priority restoration list, we systematically responded to the outages and completed restoration to 97 percent of our system within 24 hours. Within 48 hours of landfall, we were able to release the majority of our mutual aid crews, many of which were all reassigned to assist other utilities in need. The remaining mutual aid partners and internal personnel continued our cleanup efforts. By Friday evening, we declared 100 percent restoration and began preparing crews for deployment to neighboring utilities in need.

As the operations lead in charge of our restoration efforts post-storm, I'm incredibly pleased with the work we accomplished responding to Hurricane Idalia. As a public power utility, we understand our responsibility to provide reliable electric service no matter the circumstances, and we deeply



understand the value our customers place on that service.

To be efficient and accomplish the mission, it takes dedicated staff and support from within and throughout the community. Here in Tallahassee, we have both. Our staff's commitment to serving the community we live and work in and love was fully displayed throughout this event. The support from our co-workers, senior staff, elected officials and the public gives us the confidence and motivation to endure the hard work and long hours needed to get our community back up and running!

But beyond all of the extensive planning, we always remember that behind the poles and wires are real families, hoping to see our trucks and cheering when the lights come back on. We are lucky to be a part of a public power community that shares our passion and can help so many people when they need us most.



Mike Crow is the assistant general manager for power delivery for the City of Tallahassee. He has been with the City of Tallahassee since April 2022 and was with Talquin Electric Cooperative for

15 years prior to his time with the city.

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