

# RELAY



## Middle of the Marathon:

### A History of Telecom Services in Leesburg



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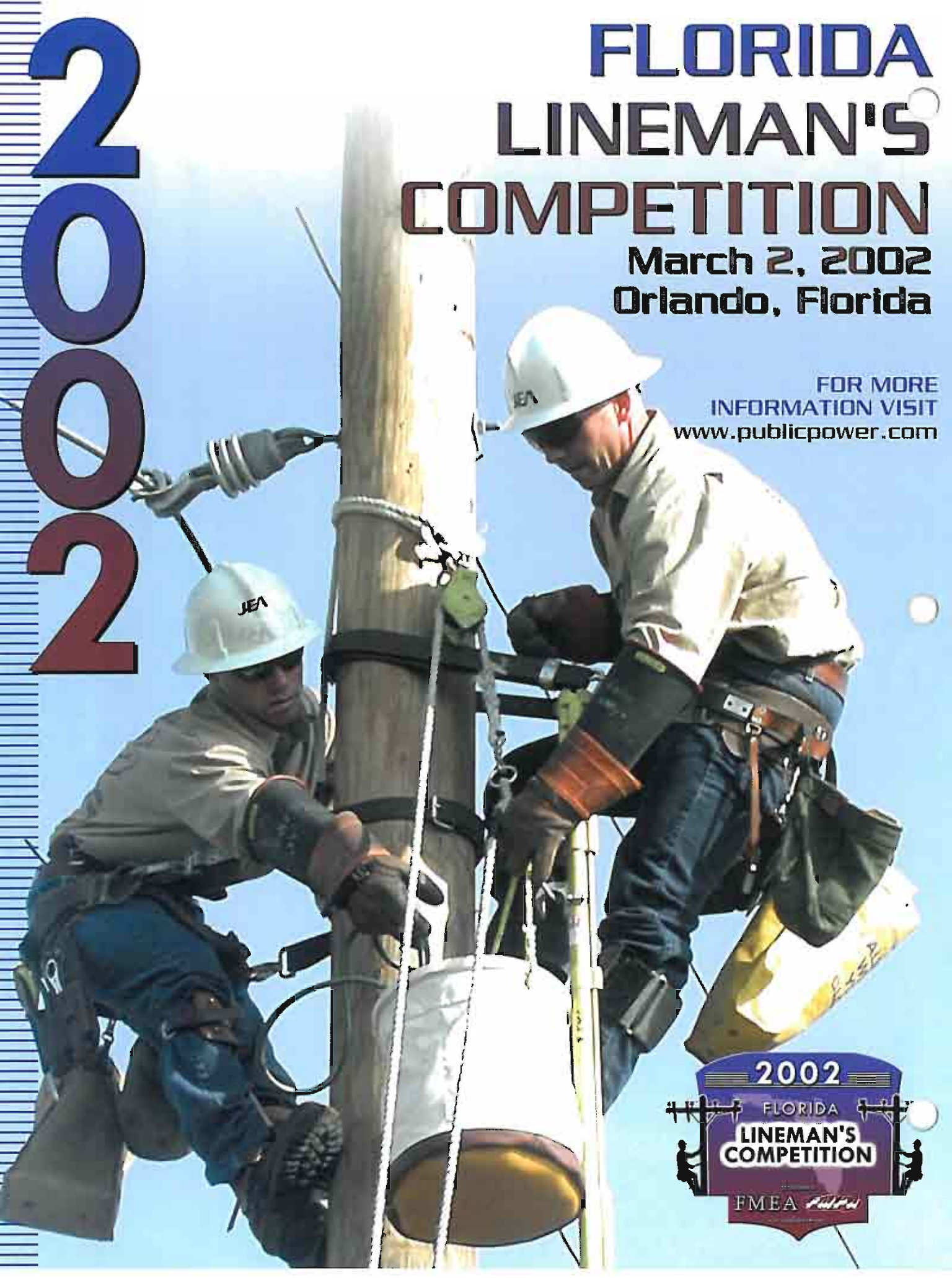
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# FLORIDA LINEMAN'S COMPETITION

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**Executive Director**

Barry J. Moline

**Editor**

Frank R. Skinner

**Assistant Editor**

Michael J. Soloway

417 East College Avenue (32301)  
P.O. Box 10114  
Tallahassee, FL 32302-2114  
Telephone: (850) 224-3314  
Fax: (850) 224-2831

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# RELAY

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# Just the Facts, Please

**W**hat is the truth? Is it the whole truth? Is it nothing but the truth? Is it your version of the truth, or my version of the truth?

A handful of municipalities are engaged with Florida Power in several truth seeking investigations. First is a group of cities who are examining their options to buy their local electrical poles and wires and create a municipal electric utility. The cities have been irked for years by frequent power outages.

Even though Florida Power has made recent strides toward improving their reliability, the cities believe they might do better on their own, accountable to their local citizens.

First the cities must verify the cost of purchasing the poles and wires within their city limits. The cities asked Florida Power for a price. The answer: the poles and wires are not for sale.

That may be fine for the moment, but the cities franchise agreements state (in two places!) that upon expiration of the contract, the cities have the right to buy the poles and wires.

No it doesn't, says Florida Power. So the cities went to court to ask a judge to read the franchise agreements. The verdict (in two courts): the cities have the rights. The court ordered mediation to identify a price.

Dissatisfied (and certainly within their legal rights), Florida Power appealed. The mediation is on hold.

Let me pause here to consider Florida Power's history with municipal utilities. Among FMEA members, Florida Power has been a long time partner in energy delivery. Florida Power has provided (and continues in several cases) power to public power utilities. Furthermore, Florida Power has developed an excellent reputation in their construction division. They have built for FMEA members transmission, distribution and substation projects

ahead of schedule and under or on-budget. Two years ago, Florida Power received FMEA's associate member of the year award.

In the meantime, Florida Power is looking to take a few swipes of its own. It sent OUC — The Reliable One, a lengthy public records request for detailed data on OUC's calculation of its reliability. It appears as though Florida Power doesn't believe OUC's claim of high reliability, and wants to crunch the numbers itself.

OUC's response went a step further. Not only is OUC supplying Florida Power with the data, but they have no plans to rely on Florida Power's calculations alone. OUC also hired an independent engineering expert to examine the data, and called on Florida Power to do the same. OUC is hopeful that Florida Power will step up and submit to an independent reliability analysis, and hold itself to the same standard it is requesting of OUC.

Why engage OUC on their reliability claims? Turns out that when some of the cities examining creating a municipal electric utility asked for input on how to run their systems, OUC, being next door to many of them, answered the call.

It's unfortunate to have strong differences with a longtime partner. Hopefully we can all address these issues professionally and continue moving forward. **R**



Barry J. Moline  
FMEA Executive Director

**OUC is hopeful that Florida Power will step up and submit to an independent reliability analysis...**

## Commissioners Expound Dim View of For-Profit Transcos

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) members, at an Oct. 24 meeting, expressed concerns that for-profit transcos are not the way to go when it comes to forming independent regional transmission organizations (RTO). Citing concerns raised by public power utilities and state regulators, Chairman Pat Wood III said there probably are some RTO duties that should be performed by a more publicly spirited entity, rather than a company driven by the profit motive.

The commission also moved to mend fences with state regulators skeptical about the agency's RTO push. "There's a lot to like about transcos (such as divestiture of transmission assets) but I'm concerned that the goal of competitive markets might not be compatible with a for-profit entity," Wood said. Commissioner Linda Breathitt cautioned that FERC might be writing a headline for reporters: "Death knell rung for stand-alone transmission companies."

The commission needs to ascertain what RTO functions should be separated out, Wood said, to balance the investment attraction of a for-profit Transco with the open market advantages of a nonprofit independent system operator. He noted that the investor-owned utilities proposing the Collaborative Governance Model – a for-profit Transco – offered an "Interim Market Administrator (IMA)" as a com-



promise to try to meet the concerns of public power utilities, the inherent bias of a single-purpose monopoly transco. The IMA would perform five core functions, such as calculating total transmission capacity and available transmission capacity.

Commissioners adopted Nora Mead Brownell's proposal to explore means by which FERC can have a more structured process for working with states to achieve the goal of competitive transmission and power markets. She suggested a regional panel comprised of FERC staff and state interests that would have defined goals and duties. In providing guidance on an RTO for the Southeast, the commission should not confine itself to the two proposals advanced at mediation proceedings, said Herbert Tate, a former Pennsylvania public utility commissioner who helped with the mediation. FERC Administrative Law Judge Bobbie McCartney, who oversaw the mediation, continued to recommend the collaborative governance model. Commissioners also heard staff reports on the efforts to form RTOs in the Northeast and Midwest.

—Public Power Daily

## ECW and Tradeshow Participants Learn How to Avoid Terrorist Attacks

In the wake of the recent terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center complex and the Pentagon, many electric utilities across the country are reevaluating their security measures at generation sites and substations.

On October 17, at the Energy Connections Workshop & Tradeshow, special guest speaker Richard Moore addressed the issue of national security and the steps necessary in minimizing a terrorist attack. As electric utilities provide the essential service of supplying power to businesses, government and residential areas, they are also prime targets for terrorist attacks.

Moore defined terrorism as "the threat to use force, or the actual use of force, by an individual or group of people, in order to change the policies of a government." The main types of terrorists include religious crusaders, political crusaders, criminals and abnormal people Moore denoted as "crazies" who do not fall into any of the aforementioned cat-

egories, yet are still off-kilter enough to commit a terrorist act.

In reducing the risk of a terrorist attack, Moore cited five crucial areas that need to be improved upon. First, increased intelligence at national, regional and local levels is imperative in reducing risk. By allowing organizations to share timely information efficiently, potential risks can be analyzed and dealt with as preventative maintenance.



Moore also noted that we should put more emphasis on "human intelligence." Second, Moore suggested that human rights and citizen rights should be defined in a way where foreign tourists and aliens do not have the same degree of rights as the regular citizenry. Third, all essential facilities should have full security, including water supplies, electric utilities and major transportation hubs. Fourth, current hiring practices should be reexamined for the use of more thorough background checking. And lastly, instituting the organization "Homeland Security" which will

integrate all levels of government using a national strategy to protect "the American continent, its territories and people."

### Abraham Announces Projects to Bolster Electricity Supply

With many areas of the country still potentially facing tight electricity supplies in coming years, Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham announced more than \$110 million in new projects to apply leading edge clean coal technologies to improve the reliability and environmental performance of the nation's coal-burning power plants.

Abraham announced that the federal government will share the costs of outfitting eight power plants to become "showcases" of ways coal plants can continue generating low-cost electricity with better performance and in compliance with tight environmental standards.

Coal-fired power plants are the workhorses of the nation's power industry. More than 600 coal-burning generators today account for more than half the electricity Americans consume.

"Our National Energy Plan recognizes that America cannot generate the electricity it needs without coal. That is why the President has pledged a new effort to work with the power industry to apply our best technology to use our vast coal reserves cleanly and economically. The projects we are announcing today will give us a 'jump-start' on the President's clean coal commitment," Abraham said.

The technology demonstrations will take place in Ohio, Florida, New York, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Kansas, and Virginia. The projects will be funded under the

"Power Plant Improvement Initiative," a Congressionally-directed effort that will serve as the precursor to President Bush's clean coal technology program.

Congress approved the initiative last October following a summer of intermittent power supply disruptions and price increases. Using funding originally allocated in the 1980s for clean coal technology demonstrations, Congress directed the Department of Energy to use up to \$95 million for projects to improve the performance of existing and new coal-fired electric power plants.

The current projects were selected from 24 proposals submitted to the department in April. Most will focus on lower cost technologies for reducing pollutants from coal-burning power plants. With many coal plants threatened with premature shutdowns because of environmental concerns, more effective and lower cost emission controls can keep generators running while improving the quality of the nation's air and water.

Other projects will improve the performance and reliability of power plants.

In one Florida project, sophisticated computer technology will be used to determine how best to clean the inside of coal boilers without disrupting plant operations. In another Florida project, a laser system will be used to measure the wear rates of materials inside a coal gasifier. Coal gasifiers could one day replace the traditional coal-burning boiler in super-clean power plants of the future.

One project will tackle the problem of waste handling from coal-burning power plants by turning the sludge from a Virginia power plant into masonry blocks, reduc-

ing the need for landfills.

Although exact dollar amounts will be determined during upcoming negotiations, the Energy Department expects to provide approximately \$51 million for the eight projects. Private sector sponsors are expected to contribute nearly \$61 million, exceeding the 50 percent private sector cost-sharing mandated by Congress. Projects will take from just over a year to five years to complete. The selected projects in Florida include:

- ◆ Tampa Electric's Big Bend Power Station in Apollo Beach where the company will apply a neural network system to determine when and how best to dislodge soot that can build up inside a boiler and degrade performance. While sootblowers are common in utility boilers, most are manually activated under preset rules or the operator's judgment. Computer controlled sootblowing technology will permit the cleaning of internal boiler surfaces with improved power plant performance. The 36-month project will receive just under \$1 million from the Energy Department with Tampa Electric providing almost \$1.5 million.

- ◆ Tampa Electric's second project will demonstrate a laser system that measures the wear pattern of the brick liner inside a coal gasifier. Coal gasification is likely to be one of the new technologies installed in future power plants largely because it offers superior environmental performance and efficiency improvements over today's coal-burning boilers. In the Energy Department's original Clean Coal Technology Program in the 1980s and 1990s, Tampa Electric built one of the nation's pioneering coal gasification power plants in Polk County. This plant will become the

test unit for the laser system. The Energy Department will fund \$640,000 of the 18-month project's \$1.7 million total cost.



### Sun Shining on JEA as Utility Wins Solar Power Award

By installing grid-tied solar electric systems at each of 18 public high schools in its service area and by providing state certified curriculum and annual teacher training, Jacksonville's electric utility, JEA, has received the "Award for Solar Program Achievement" for its steady development of a solar community.

The recognition was awarded by the Washington-based Solar Electric Power Association, a partnership of leading electric utilities, energy service providers and companies that produce solar electric generating equipment.

In addition to the solar electric installations, JEA is developing technician and city electrical inspector training, and funding the development of a clean and renewable energy laboratory. JEA plans a solar energy system rebate program to begin in January 2002, to stimulate residential and commercial installations of solar electric and solar thermal systems in JEA's service territory.

JEA is also installing solar electric systems at the four colleges in its service area – University of North Florida, Jacksonville University, Edward Waters College, and Florida Community College in Jacksonville.

### Energy Department Looking to Expand Approaches for Storing Natural Gas

The amount of natural gas needed to fuel new electric power plants projected to be built in the next 20 years is likely to outstrip existing pipeline capacity making natural gas storage an increasingly important element of the nation's energy infrastructure.

To prepare for the day when natural gas may need to be stored in a variety of different settings – for example, as hydrates in above-ground tanks, or in chilled form in refrigerated rock caverns, or in salt formations miles away from the nation's coastline – the U.S. Department of Energy has selected four projects to study these innovative gas storage methods.

Valued at more than \$2.5 billion, these cost-shared projects are expected to expand the geographic locations around the country where natural gas could be stored, making the U.S. gas delivery system more responsive to consumer needs.

Today, more than 400 underground rock or salt formations or depleted reservoirs serve as storage reservoirs for natural gas. These gas storage sites are heavily clustered in and around major eastern and midcontinent markets. Many regions, however, such as the South Atlantic and Pacific Northwest, do not have the right geology for conventional gas storage in underground formations. Even where suit-



able geology exists, some existing conventional storage does not meet the requirements of end users.

To help the industry expand the nation's gas storage system, the Energy Department's Strategic Center for Natural Gas – part of the National Energy Technology Laboratory – is preparing to award research contracts to:

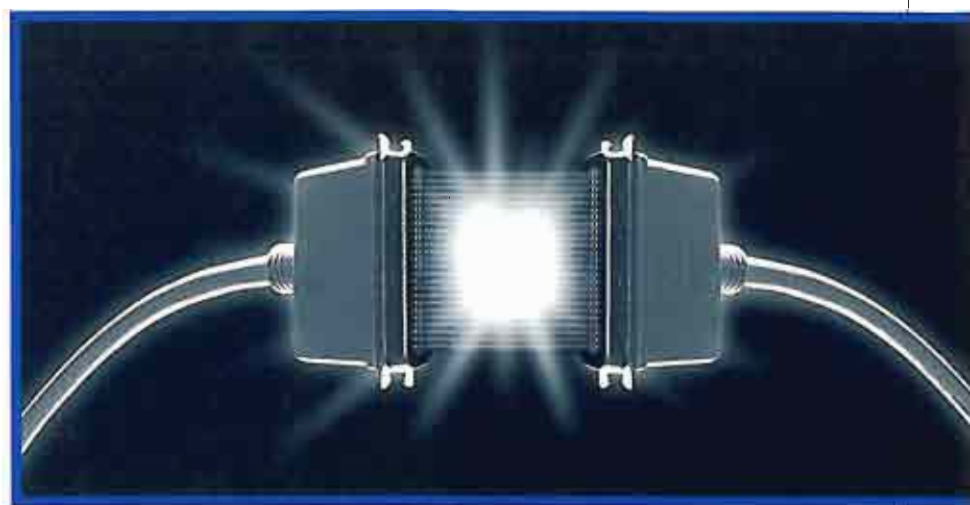
- ◆ New York State Museum, Albany, NY, which proposes to use sophisticated geologic reservoir techniques to develop a systematic “blueprint” for removing and disposing of salt water (brine) produced when caverns are developed in areas remote to ocean disposal. Brine disposal is the primary barrier to using salt caverns for natural gas storage sites in many regions of the U.S. Emphasis is on identifying potential reservoirs that can accept large volumes of brine and maintain acceptable environmental levels near salt deposits that have the potential for gas storage cavern development in the Northeast.

- ◆ CAES Development Co., LLC, Houston, TX, which plans to conduct a proof-of-concept study to establish the potential for full-scale deployment and commercialization of a previously developed DOE technology, known as Refrigerated-Mined Rock Cavern Technology (RMRCT). The RMRCT concept involves mining deep openings in crystalline rocks to store chilled and compressed natural gas in areas without conventional gas storage options. Chilling the gas means more gas can be stored in the space available, and mining costs can be reduced. The project will use a compressed air energy storage facility being built in Norion, Ohio, to test how hard rocks react to pressure changes. Because conditions at the air storage facility would be similar

to those at an RMRCT facility, the proposed work is directly applicable to understanding the physical nature of the technology.

- ◆ Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS, which will demonstrate a gas-hydrate storage process for safe, aboveground natural gas storage that operates at moderate pressures and temperatures. Hydrates are ice-like formations with a molecular structure that holds large volumes of gas. The proposed work will design, assemble and dem-

dissolution. The project focuses on developing a case study of a limestone formation near major pipelines and gas markets by establishing preliminary specifications for the technology, modeling the limestone dissolution process and storage field performance, and preparing an economic analysis. If successful, the project could be applied to the Northeast, Midwest, Western states and several other regions in the country where carbonate formations are widespread.



onstrate, at proof-of-concept scale, a gas-hydrate laboratory process that pressurizes a surfactant and water solution to grow gas-laden, self-packing hydrates on metal. Previously supported DOE research shows a test cell could be packed with gas hydrates containing about 86 percent of their maximum theoretical storage capacity in less than three hours. This project will scale up that work using a 20-gallon cylindrical tank, aluminum plates and a surfactant-water solution to grow the hydrates.

- ◆ Clemson University, Clemson, SC, which will assess the costs of creating gas storage capacity within underground carbonate rocks by using hydraulic fracturing and acid

## 1,600 Tune In to KUA.net's Live Webcast

On October 14, 1,600 Internet users from across the nation visited Kissimmee as part of a first-ever live event webcast of Viva Osceola Festival Latino.

Visitors to a special web site (<http://viva.kua.net>) watched the 7-hour event using wireless video streaming equipment provided by KUA.net, the Internet division of the Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA).

“We are extremely pleased with the response we received,” said Chris Gent, KUA’s manager of corporate communications. “This first-ever live webcast from Osceola county shows the future potential of the

Internet.”

In addition, KUA.net provided a complimentary Cyber Café for those seeking to surf the World Wide Web or check personal e-mail while attending the Viva Osceola festival. The Café used KUA.net’s wireless network that delivered data at 11 Mbps (11 million bits per second) - 200 times faster than a standard 56k dial-up connection.

Viva Osceola is an annual event that offers well-known cultural musicians and artists, as well as an array of tempting Spanish cuisine.

### Key West Employees Volunteer at Polls

In a first-of-its kind partnership, Key West City Electric System employees teamed up with the Supervisor of Elections to help staff pre-

cincts on Election Day October 2, 2001.

“City Electric System had 25 employees volunteering at various precincts in Key West,” Raymond Rodriguez, general manager, said. “This is a great opportunity for City Electric System and its employees to be involved in the community.”

Recognizing a need in the community, the Utility Board approved CES Elections Work - Community Outreach Program during its July 31 meeting. Through the program, CES provides release time to employees willing to work as poll workers during elections. Participating employees, must be registered voters, agree to participate in a training session and then staff the polls during elections. The stipend usually paid to poll workers is signed over to

a local charity on behalf of City Electric System and the employee.

In August, City Electric System recruited employees for the new program. More than 30 employees volunteered to participate in the new community outreach program.

“Everyone benefits,” Rodriguez said. “City Electric System employees will be helping in the community by both working the polls and donating money to deserving local agencies, and our employees will have the opportunity to provide a value community service.”

Joyce Griffin, assistant supervisor of elections, points out that the Elections Office “is always in need of poll workers. [City Electric System] is fulfilling a need that we’ve always had a hard time with.” **R**

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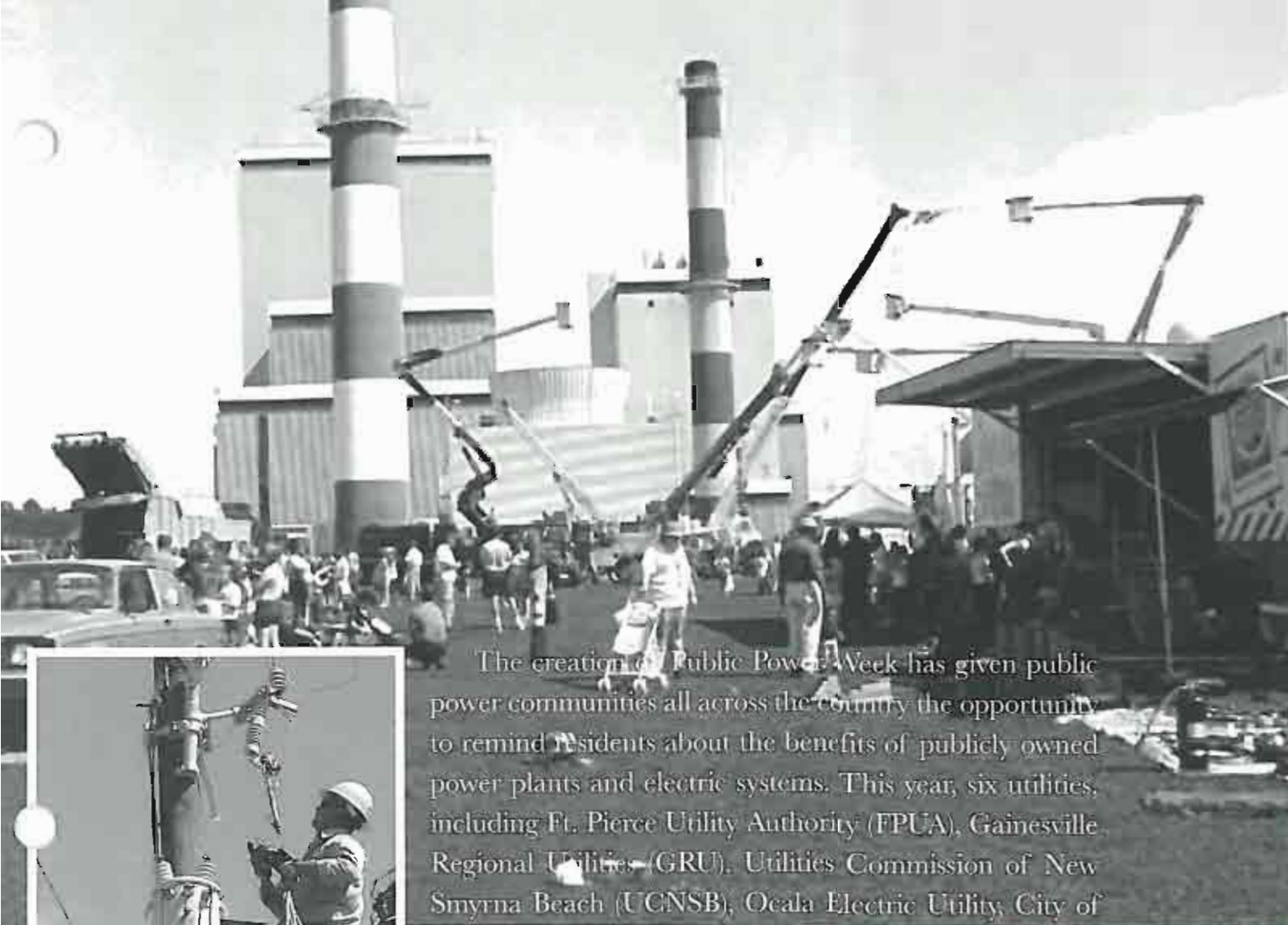
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# Public Power Week Highlights

**E**ach year, more than 2,000 of the nation's community-owned utilities observe Public Power Week, a weeklong celebration commemorating the not-for-profit electric utilities that proudly serve the power needs of approximately 40 million Americans, or roughly 15 percent of electricity customers nationwide.

Every public power system may be different, due to its community population, geography, climate, natural, social and economic resources; however, all public power communities have one important goal in mind -- to provide adequate, reliable electricity at a reasonable rate while protecting the nation's environment.





The creation of Public Power Week has given public power communities all across the country the opportunity to remind residents about the benefits of publicly owned power plants and electric systems. This year, six utilities, including Ft. Pierce Utility Authority (FPUA), Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU), Utilities Commission of New Smyrna Beach (UCNSB), Ocala Electric Utility, City of Tallahassee, and the City of Vero Beach, celebrated Public Power Week with games, tours and special demonstrations.

These Florida utilities provided bucket truck rides, face painting, police and fire demonstrations, food, music, and power plant tours in association with open house activities. In Ocala, city officials offered hands-on educational activities like pole-climbing and hand tool safety during their annual World of Electricity Expo. Vero Beach opened up their manatee viewing area for what they called a “family picnic,” while New Smyrna Beach promoted their Green-Pricing Program to help fund solar projects around the area. This year, because of the national tragedy on Sept. 11, GRU also incorporated patriotism into their celebration by giving away flag posters to attendees.

“People love it,” said GRU’s Dan Jesse of their 5th Annual Electrifying Celebration. “And it raises awareness at the same time.” ■



# 2001

## ENERGY CONNECTIONS

### WORKSHOP & TRADESHOW

#### HIGHLIGHTS



Using "Verbal Judo," police officer Thomas Gleason with T&G Consulting explains the proper ways to confront obstinate people.



JEA's Steve Lancaster talks about new technology to improve large industrial customer reliability in the Transmission & Distribution workshop.

This year's Energy Connections Workshop & Tradeshow took place in St. Augustine at the World Golf Village Renaissance Resort. On hand were utility industry professionals representing Florida's municipal, cooperative and investor-owned utilities as well as representatives from over 50 energy and telecom-related companies.

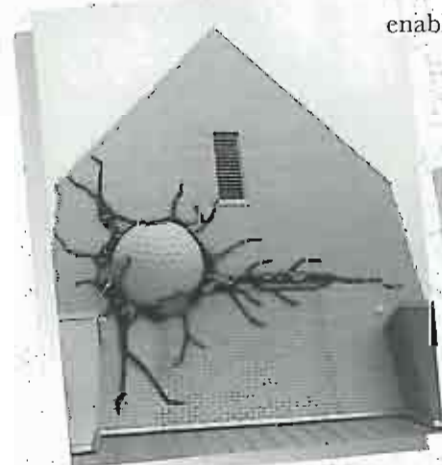
The hot topic of this year's event dealt with terrorist attacks and how electric utilities can minimize their risk against physical and biological aggression. In addition, this year's event highlighted a new topic pertinent to all utilities - dealing with angry customers and/or emotionally rattled coworkers, albeit with a twist. Lakeland police officer Thomas Gleason addressed the crowd in Tuesday's general session with "Verbal Judo: The Art of Speaking Effectively" and introduced people to a new approach in verbally dealing with obstinate people.

Energy Connections ended Wednesday evening with the ever-popular networking event that allowed participants to mingle and talk in a casual setting, surrounded by glow-in-the-dark miniature golf and interactive music.

As the electric industry environment changes, the Energy Connections Workshop & Tradeshow brings people of all utility sizes together to share ideas about improving aspects of their utility operations and to learn about the latest projects, services and trends that will enable them to better serve the people in their communities.



Veranda Jackson of EHAP Inc., speaks in the Customer Connections workshop regarding leadership skills and earning respect.



**FMEA would like to thank the following companies for exhibiting their products and services in the 2001 Energy Connections Tradeshow:**

Action Utility Products  
 Asplundh Tree Expert Co.  
 AURSI  
 AVO International  
 BESCO  
 Cable Constructors  
 Davey Resource Group  
 Electric Sales Associates  
 Engineer Sales Company  
 English, Smith & Associates  
 EPICUS  
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 GRESCO/Capstone  
 Griffith, Herron, Middlebrook & Ross  
 Hometown Connections  
 Hughes Supply  
 Invensys Control Systems  
 JEA's GROUNDWORKS  
 John Carter & Associates  
 Lekson Associates  
 LIFT-ALL division of Hydra Tech  
 LINC.net  
 Osmose  
 Panasonic  
 Priority Billing  
 R&R SYS-TEC  
 Ram-Soft  
 RS Sales  
 Simes-Sutton Associates  
 Sterling Planet  
 UC&I Sales  
 Wartsila  
 Wesco Distribution

**FMEA would like to thank the following companies for sponsoring events at the 2001 Energy Connections Workshop & Tradeshow:**

**FLORIDA POWER CORPORATION**  
**FLORIDA TRANSFORMER, INC.**  
**GULFSTREAM NATURAL GAS SYSTEM**  
**BESCO, INC.**

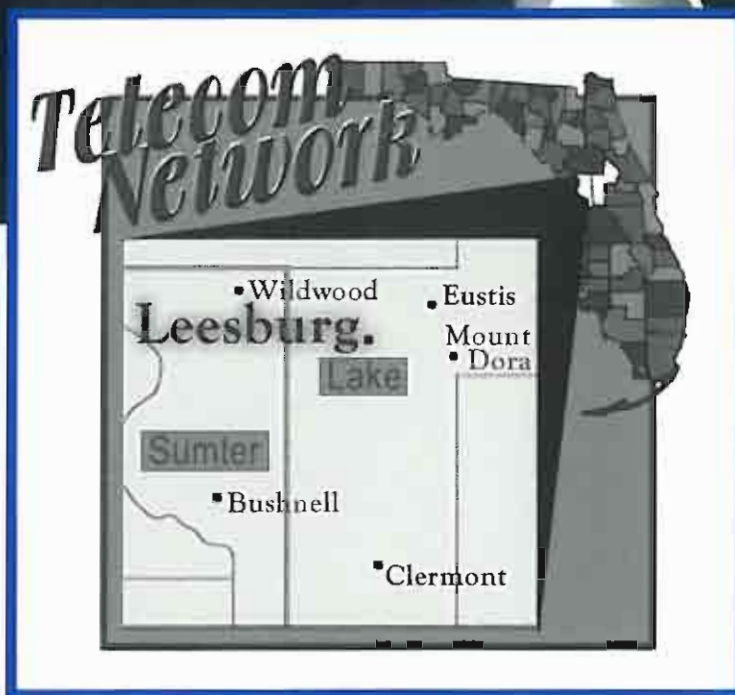


Richard Moore, during a special session, introduces five ways to minimize the risk of a terrorist attack.



Recipients of the 2001 FMEA Community Service Awards. From left to right: Joseph Arline, City of Bartow; Susan Noell, City of Bushnell; Diane Mellert, Fort Pierce Utilities Authority; Atawa Rollins, Gainesville Regional Utilities; Susan Pinder, Key West; Randy Dotson, Lakeland Electric; Donna Colwell, City of Leesburg; Jean Henning, Ocala Electric Utility; Dale Barker, Orlando Utilities Commission; Chris Gent, Kissimmee Utility Authority.





## Get Set . . .

Telecommunications refers to long-distance communication. In Greek "tele" means far off. At present, "far off" communication is carried out with the aid of electronic equipment such as radio, telegraph, telephone or television. In earlier times, smoke signals, drums and light beacons were used for the same purpose. The information that is transmitted can be in the form of voice, symbols, pictures, or data, or a combination of these. The physical equipment for a telecommunications system includes a transmitter, one or more receivers, and a channel or means of communication such as the air, water, wire, cable, communications satellite, or some combination of these.

Telecom services in Leesburg evolved naturally from a system of fiber optic cables installed in 1984 to serve as communication links for the SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) System. This SCADA System consisted of RTUs (monitoring devices) attached to electric substations and transformers throughout the grid. These RTUs were originally linked together by T-1 lines supplied by the local telephone company. (The term 'T-1 usually refers to data transport services at a maximum rate of 1.5 million bits per second. The T-1 stands for a line capable of handling 24 telephone calls simultaneously.) For the first time, data was transmitted back to a centrally located computer system designed to monitor loads and outages. But these T-1 connections were costly and limited. In 1985, the City of Leesburg replaced the T-1 system by installing 26 miles of its own fiber optic cable network.

In 1989, plans were formulated that would eventually connect all city owned and occupied buildings to the same network of computers using fiber optics. But work on the project proceeded slowly. Three years later, Knight Enterprises contacted the Leesburg Data Processing Department to discuss the potential of a fiber optic "highway" connecting major Florida cities. During these early



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conversations, it was suggested the City of Leesburg form a joint venture with Alternative Communications Networks (ACN) to develop the project within the Leesburg utility territory. Knight Enterprises and ACN would offer fiber optic construction experience, design know-how, and sales and billing capabilities. Originally, the proposal was driven by the changing needs of the local hospital and community businesses.

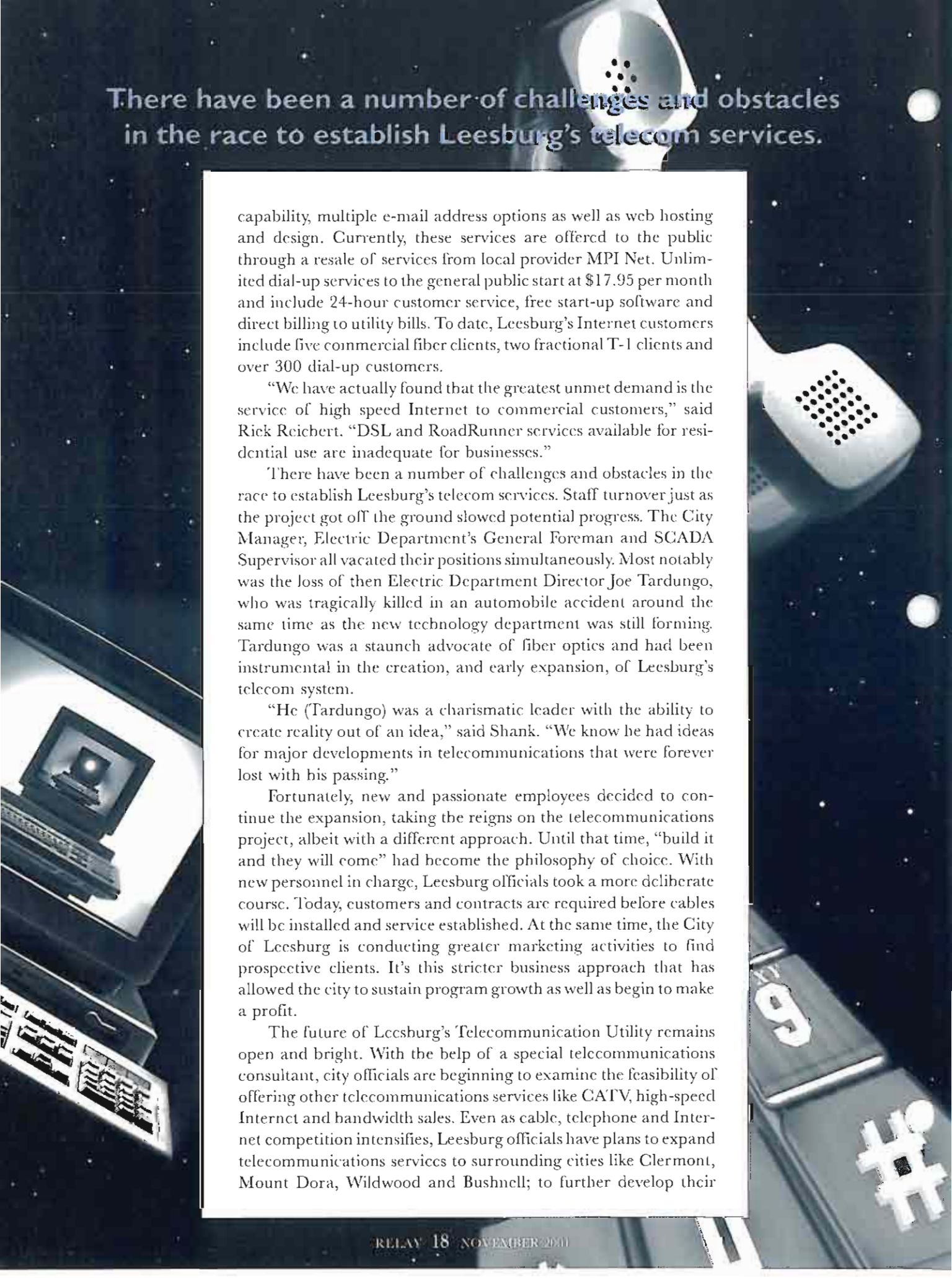
Around the same time, the National Information Infrastructure arm of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce had been created under the Clinton Administration. Under a nationwide plan, local governments across the country, and specifically those with electric utilities, were being not only encouraged to help in the construction of a national Information Superhighway, but federal grants were being offered to assist in city projects. With this in mind, the City of Leesburg moved forward in their plan to provide high speed fiber optic communications to the area hospital, with the intent of creating a high speed fiber optic backbone, so that rural areas like Leesburg could help connect the nation and eventually compete with larger cities with greater budgets. Later, to reflect this change in philosophy, the city's Data Processing Department would be renamed the Department of Information and Communications Services.

Today, Knight Enterprises and ACN have all but abandoned any telecommunications projects in Leesburg. Currently, the city is busy assuming tasks negotiated in the original partnership. But Leesburg's fiber optic cable network now consists of another 38 miles of 96-count single-mode fiber. In addition to the original 26 miles of SCADA two-count, multi-mode fiber, Leesburg has installed 1.5 miles of six-count, multi-mode; 1.5 miles of 24-count composite; 5.5 miles of 30-count composite; and is currently adding another half mile of six-count line and 2.5 miles of 30-count composite fiber to the system. The main corridor runs from the City of Eustis in the east to the Sumter County border in the west. Some of the fiber is being used to connect 15 city buildings and nine hospital facilities.

"There are three other agencies within the city that have expressed interest in becoming a fiber optics customer for data communications," said Leesburg Director of the Electric Department Lloyd Shank. "There still does not exist any high speed alternative to the city's fiber."

### Go . . .

The creation and development of the Internet and the World Wide Web has been monumental in the historical advancement of worldwide telecommunications, especially over the last decade. In Leesburg, Internet services include fractional T-1 up to full T-1



## There have been a number of challenges and obstacles in the race to establish Leesburg's telecom services.

capability, multiple e-mail address options as well as web hosting and design. Currently, these services are offered to the public through a resale of services from local provider MPI Net. Unlimited dial-up services to the general public start at \$17.95 per month and include 24-hour customer service, free start-up software and direct billing to utility bills. To date, Leesburg's Internet customers include five commercial fiber clients, two fractional T-1 clients and over 300 dial-up customers.


"We have actually found that the greatest unmet demand is the service of high speed Internet to commercial customers," said Rick Reichert. "DSL and RoadRunner services available for residential use are inadequate for businesses."

There have been a number of challenges and obstacles in the race to establish Leesburg's telecom services. Staff turnover just as the project got off the ground slowed potential progress. The City Manager, Electric Department's General Foreman and SCADA Supervisor all vacated their positions simultaneously. Most notably was the loss of then Electric Department Director Joe Tardungo, who was tragically killed in an automobile accident around the same time as the new technology department was still forming. Tardungo was a staunch advocate of fiber optics and had been instrumental in the creation, and early expansion, of Leesburg's telecom system.

"He (Tardungo) was a charismatic leader with the ability to create reality out of an idea," said Shank. "We know he had ideas for major developments in telecommunications that were forever lost with his passing."

Fortunately, new and passionate employees decided to continue the expansion, taking the reigns on the telecommunications project, albeit with a different approach. Until that time, "build it and they will come" had become the philosophy of choice. With new personnel in charge, Leesburg officials took a more deliberate course. Today, customers and contracts are required before cables will be installed and service established. At the same time, the City of Leesburg is conducting greater marketing activities to find prospective clients. It's this stricter business approach that has allowed the city to sustain program growth as well as begin to make a profit.

The future of Leesburg's Telecommunication Utility remains open and bright. With the help of a special telecommunications consultant, city officials are beginning to examine the feasibility of offering other telecommunications services like CATV, high-speed Internet and bandwidth sales. Even as cable, telephone and Internet competition intensifies, Leesburg officials have plans to expand telecommunications services to surrounding cities like Clermont, Mount Dora, Wildwood and Bushnell; to further develop their



fiber infrastructure and increase services to area school and government facilities as well. Unlike in those early years of telecommunications development, the City of Leesburg is using valuable resources to help promote and advertise new utility services. Newspaper ads, bill stuffers, pamphlets, direct mail campaigns and local promotional magazines have been enlisted to increase awareness and benefits of available telecom services.

"It is my hope that the telecommunications utility continues to grow and prosper," said Reichert. "It is my belief that it can bring in more revenue . . . than all the other utilities combined if properly handled and promoted."

Because of Leesburg's new advertising campaign, utility officials are beginning to see improvement. Last year, Internet revenue alone was roughly \$45,000, while net income from all telecom sources broke \$55,500. With the program's recent success, the City Commission can afford to build long-range plans, like the conversion of Leesburg's overhead electric system into an underground network of fiber.

"The greatest benefit in offering telecom services is offering technology for the improvement of life and economy of our residents," said Leesburg City Manager Ron Stock. "Secondary, albeit a major benefit, is telecom as an additional revenue source in support of operations of the city."

With further thought and foresight, the City Commission has selected a Telecommunications Advisory Committee that will help city staff develop appropriate philosophies and future telecommunications plans. The Advisory Commission is made up of local experts and entrepreneurs in telecommunications technology.

"Together, they have both a thorough knowledge of the community benefits . . . and they are able to offer superb advice on a developing new business," said Shank. "And as longstanding members of the community they offer a significant understanding of the needs and desires of the people living here."

### **And Go . . .**

The world of telecommunications has come a long way since marathon runs, drum beats and smoke signals. After all, it took half an hour and 173 torch signs to say "One hundred Cretans have deserted" some 2,500 years ago. But it could be said telecommunications in Leesburg, and in general for that matter, originated along the Marathon Man's path in Greece. Even today, thousands of years and inventions later, that first marathon runner's words still ring true. We have all been the beneficiaries of revolutionary technologies. "We are the winners," said the Messenger. Today, Leesburg continues to run its own marathon. And it intends to stay out in front. ■

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