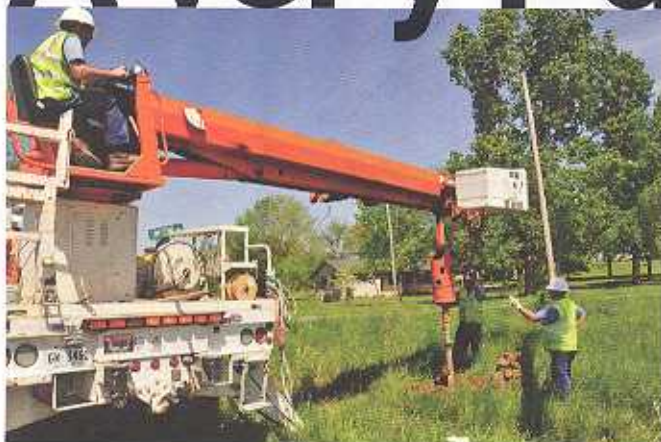


Open channels of communication help this Tennessee electric, water and wastewater, cable, Internet, phone, and gas utility continue to provide quality service.

A Very Public Utility



Britt Dye started working for Fayetteville Public Utilities (FPU) when he was 18 years old, and he joked that to say a lot has changed in the industry would be a gross understatement. In 2006, he was named CEO and general manager of this city-owned utility provider based in South-Central Tennessee and has spent the last two years upgrading infrastructure, improving communication, and reviving conservation efforts.

FPU is composed of five departments: water and wastewater, gas, telecommunications, administration, and electric. The city consolidated its electric, gas, and water utilities in 2002, creating a unified and more efficient administration division to oversee all three. Like so many big changes for FPU in recent years, Dye said that consolidation was made to better serve the customer.

"The departments still operate mostly independently from one another and, in accordance with the law, all our financial statements are separate, but now we can offer residents a one-stop shop for their utility needs," said Dye.



Britt Dye, CEO and general manager

That has been especially true since 1999, when FPU added a telecommunications department. In July, the organization launched VoIP service as it continues to compete with private cable and Internet providers.

Although each department operates independently, Dye said there is a lot of safety

and emergency cross-training for all personnel, resulting in a number of employees who can cover shifts in any department if the need arises. That's helped Dye and his teams reduce costs across the board in an uncertain industry.

"We maintain a lean staff and have made significant cuts wherever we can, and if things get worse, we have a contingency plan that lists specific items we can cut in the future," he said. "Our goal is to stay financially secure without sacrificing on service for our customers."

Recent investments

Dye said FPU's partnership with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) organization has been instrumental in keeping costs low and helping FPU bring renewable energy to Fayetteville.

"Earlier in the year, prices were high due to a drought that eliminated TVA's inexpensive hydro resources and the jump in the cost of natural gas," said Dye. "Prices have since come down, and TVA and all its members are eager to help our consumers out with lower monthly bills."

He explained that TVA relies mostly on natural gas and coal-fired power plants but also draws from hydroelectric and some nuclear plants. FPU and other distributors of TVA power are working toward a consensus of the most effective renewable resources for the group to invest in, with options like methane, solar, and wind on the table.

Closer to home, Dye and his team brought back FPU's Energy Right program last year. The program, which had

been dormant for a number of years, allows reimbursements to consumers who opt for water heaters or other energy products that conserve power. FPU also started offering online self-audits for residential customers and professional energy audits for commercial or industrial customers to help FPU customers conserve energy.

"The industry is moving at a breakneck pace, so it's tough for a small utility to keep up sometimes. We're doing everything we can to provide the most up-to-date and highest quality service, and we're thankful to have TVA as a partner," Dye said.

Dye said his priority over the next few years is improving the reliability of the FPU system. That includes building or updating substations to handle load fluctuations in the electric system. Dye said he and his team are currently weighing the merits of switching to a time-of-use electric billing system and will spend \$17 million in system upgrades, particularly changing conductors.

It also includes updating FPU's water and wastewater infrastructure to keep up with changing state regulations. The organization recently installed remote-read ERT meters for its wastewater system and is moving into phase two of its water upgrade plan, which includes a \$4 million investment in its treatment plant.

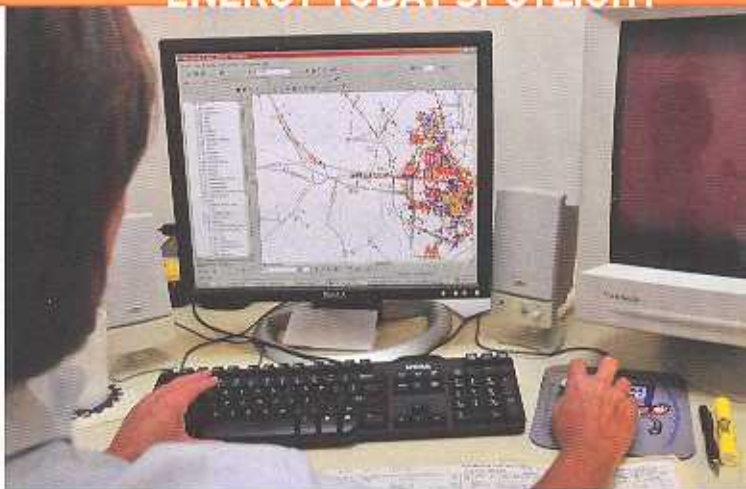
Doors are always open

Communicating all these investments and improvements to FPU customers has been a priority for Dye. The organization's Web site features frequent updates from Dye and his team and live footage of various parts of the organization, as broadcast on local cable channel six. Dye said when the company went into telecommunications, it started broadcasting live from the facilities to show customers what goes on behind the scenes, and now most of videos are shown on the site as well.

FPU also writes articles for the local newspapers and occasionally for *Tennessee*, a statewide monthly publication.

Communication is especially important when a customer's bill is affected, Dye said, adding that the organization gets the most questions, naturally, when rates go up.

"It's important to us that our customers understand how their bills break down each month and where their power is coming from," he said. "Utilities sometimes have a reputation as slow-moving and ambiguous, but here at FPU, we strive to maintain a continuous open loop of information."



That includes internally among FPU employees. Dye said without the dedication and hard work of staff, the organization would not be able to deliver its promise of consistent high quality and said his secret for fostering that work ethic is to treat everyone fairly and always be honest. In 2007, Dye instituted monthly squad meetings that consist of a 22-person cross section of FPU's departments.

"Everyone gets to hear what their coworkers are doing and ask me and my team questions about what's next for FPU. The result has been an increase in collaboration, which will help our organization continue to improve," concluded Dye. ☀

—Meghan Flynn



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