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Florida Public Power Leaders and Utility Recognized with National Awards

Awards acknowledge their contributions to the electric utility industry and their communities

Tallahassee, Fla. – Two Florida public power leaders and one Florida public power utility were recognized with national awards for their contributions and service to their communities and customers. The American Public Power Association (APPA) recognized Manuel Ortega (Kissimmee Utility Authority Chairman), Terry Torrens (Orlando Utilities Commission Senior Legislative Affairs, Regulatory, and Compliance Representative), and the City of Winter Park Electric Utility.

Manuel Ortega received the Spence Vanderlinden Public Official Award, which recognizes elected or appointed local officials who have contributed to APPA's goals. Ortega has been a member of the Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA) board of directors since 2015 and currently serves as its chairman.

Ortega advocates tirelessly not only for KUA, but for all municipal electric utilities as a member of APPA's Policy Maker Council. He travels to Tallahassee and Washington, D.C., throughout the year to speak with federal and state lawmakers on behalf of his utility and state, and national public power trade associations. He previously served on the Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) Legislative & Regulatory Committee.

Terry Torrens received the Harold Kramer-John Preston Personal Service Award, which recognizes member utility employees who have made significant contributions toward APPA's goals and enhanced its prestige. During her seven-year tenure at the Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC), she has become an active member of both APPA and FMEA.

Torrens serves as a voting delegate at APPA Legislative & Resolutions Committee meeting and the annual Association Business Meeting. In addition, Terry routinely advocates for public power issues in Washington, D.C., through her participation with APPA, FMEA and the Large Public Power Council. At the state level, she serves on the FMEA Legislative & Regulatory Committee. She frequently attends the APPA Legislative Rally and actively participates in FMEA's Annual Conference.

“Manny and Terry are strong advocates for public power at the local, state and national levels and are keenly aware of the value public power brings to the communities they serve,” said Amy Zubaly, FMEA Executive Director. “In addition to their leadership at the local level, Manny and Terry have taken active roles within APPA and FMEA, and both organizations have benefitted from their insights, expertise and passion for public power. We are fortunate to have their thought leadership and congratulate them on these high honors.”

The City of Winter Park Electric Utility received the prestigious E.F. Scattergood System Achievement Award, which recognizes public power utilities with outstanding achievements. The City of Winter Park Electric Utility is the youngest municipal electric utility in Florida, having celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2025. The community elected to form its own utility largely due to concerns regarding reliability and cost.

Since 2005, when the city purchased the electric distribution system from the incumbent investor-owned utility, businesses and residents have reaped a total of \$135 million in quantifiable financial benefits on a \$42 million purchase price: \$70 million from lower rates and \$65 million invested in undergrounding.

Since municipalization, the City of Winter Park Electric Utility has maintained its promise of lower rates for customers. Today, the rate for the municipal utility’s 1,000 kWh residential customers is significantly lower than the rate of what would have been the incumbent investor-owned utility. Following Hurricane Milton in 2024, the utility’s undergrounding efforts lead to both fewer outages and faster restoration times for the city. Only 250 of the utility’s 15,000 customers lost power, and all were restored within 12 hours.

As good stewards of the Winter Park community, the utility’s service goes beyond providing reliable electricity. It regularly participates in events throughout the community, such as reading to children at the local library, assisting groups with community holiday decorations, and more, including the utility’s milestone 20th anniversary community-wide celebration.

Additionally, the City of Winter Park Electric Utility is a strong partner in the public power mutual aid network. FMEA has recognized the utility in 2024, 2022 and 2017 with its Restoring Communities Award for the utility’s efforts to provide or receive mutual aid following significant weather events, for exemplary restoration performance in its own community, or to others on blue sky days.

“The City of Winter Park Electric Utility is a public power success story,” said Jacob Williams, Florida Municipal Power Agency General Manager and CEO. “All the efforts surrounding the City of Winter Park Electric Utility – predating its formal inception to its creation and now its operation over the last 20 years – are a testament to their dedication to providing affordable, reliable power along with the best possible service to the community. As a result, they have become an example of what public power can be and the positive change it can provide.”

The recipients were among 26 individual winners and 10 utility winners this year. The winners were announced at the APPA National Conference in Boston. APPA is the national trade association representing more than 2,000 public power utilities nationwide.

PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS:

Photo 1:



Manuel Ortega, Chairman of the Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA), accepts the American Public Power Association's Spence Vanderlinden Public Official Award.

Photo 2:



Terry Torrens, Orlando Utilities Commission's (OUC) Senior Legislative Affairs, Regulatory, and Compliance Representative, accepts the American Public Power Association's Harold Kramer-John Preston Personal Service Award.

Photo 3:



Representatives of the City of Winter Park Electric Utility accept the American Public Power Association's E.F. Scattergood System Achievement Award.

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Florida Municipal Electric Association

The Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) represents the unified interests of 33 public power communities across the state, which provide electricity to more than 4 million of Florida's residential and business consumers.

Florida Municipal Power Agency

Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA) is a wholesale power agency owned by 33 municipal electric utilities. FMPA's mission is to provide low-cost and reliable power plus value-added services for FMPA's owner customers that benefit their communities and customers. The 33 members of FMPA serve more than 4 million Florida residents and businesses and employ more than 4,700 people.