



Governor's Sterling Award Best Practice

Title of Best Practice: Being Part of the Community

Description of Best Practice: The work done by the City of Tallahassee Underground Utilities ("UU"), providing water, wastewater, stormwater and natural gas services to our community allows us to improve the environment and quality of life of our community; but it's not enough to meet the Underground Utilities vision of "Setting the Standard for Excellence". To set the standard, UU must not just serve the community, but be a part of it. Accordingly, UU Leadership participates in a number of community programs, and UU employees are encouraged to volunteer at community events and participate in community discussions. Some of UU's activities are listed below.

- The **Neighborhood Leadership Academy (NLA) Program** – a twelve-week program targeted toward key neighborhood leaders and homeowner associations across the service area.
- Focused community **Outreach in South City district** – an area with statistically higher infant mortality rates, targeted for efforts to improve quality of life including new storm-water, water and sewer infrastructure projects.
- Engagement with **Local Homeless / Transitional Living Facility through a Hiring Program** – UU regularly identifies job opportunities that could be filled by these individuals and through that, helps increase their contribution to society.
- Participation in the City's **Utility Citizens Advisory Committee** – actively participating in the city-wide organization linking customer concerns and future focus.
- Sponsorship of **Community Garden Project** in depressed neighborhood - An abandoned site in a depressed area was identified as a future home of a community garden. UU, in concert with other civic and community leaders supported the local community through an irrigation system, resulting in a position community experience and a sense of neighborhood.
- **Housing Authority Gas Program** – retrofitting existing low income housing from electric to affordable gas.

Results:

- Construction of a Stormwater facility (Cascades Park) that is also recognized as a premier park and venue.
- Consistently high Customer Service Transactional Survey Results.
- Reduction in wastewater system damage claims.
- Excellent Utility Services Affordability Index ratings.
- Steady reduction in residential water usage (conservation).
- Consistent growth in Natural Gas Customers, consistently exceeding statewide benchmarks.

Application: (How could this best practice be replicated in other organizations?)

Every community has neighborhood and business associations as well as civic groups and non-profit service organizations. Attend, participate, listen and serve. The voice of the customer can be heard as individuals and as a community. And customers value being served – as individuals and as a community.