



FLORIDA'S WOMEN IN ENERGY

LEADERSHIP FORUM

**CHAMPION IN ENERGY**

**AUGUST 2019**

## Melissa Dykes

President & Chief Operating Officer

JEA

### What inspired you to join the energy industry?

I began my career at the World Bank researching how to deliver infrastructure services to the poorest areas in developing countries. Seeing tanker trucks being used as alternatives to central water infrastructure and dung fires for cooking and heating gave me a great appreciation for the ways in which infrastructure services touch the lives of every single person on the planet. Having these experiences so early in my career made me realize how fortunate we are in this country to have access to safe, reliable, clean and affordable electricity and water services. I continue to be inspired by JEA's impact on the community every day as we work to make sure each and every member of our community receives great service from our utility.

*"Having a strong team in place – at all levels of our business – is critical to our success."*

### What is one piece of advice that you have for women wanting to enter the field or rise in the ranks of leadership?

I would advise any woman interested in energy to use her unique skills and experiences to carve out a place for herself in this industry. This is an incredibly exciting time for the energy industry as it evolves to meet the demands of a growing population in a technology-driven world. Every business in this sector is grappling with the same challenges and in need of new thought leadership and innovative solutions. Having more women enter this field at all levels – including leadership roles - is imperative to diversify the energy workforce and propel the industry forward.

### What is the most memorable lesson or skill that you have learned in the energy industry?

One of the most significant lessons I've learned in this industry is the importance of surrounding yourself with the best and brightest minds in order to achieve a common mission. For JEA, that mission is to provide the best service by becoming the center of our customers' energy and water experience. I'm inspired every day by the lengths JEA employees will go to in order to deliver exceptional service to our customers and to the greater Jacksonville community. Having a strong team in place – at all levels of our business – is critical to our success.

The annual Florida's Women in Energy Leadership Forum aims to promote opportunities in the energy industry by recognizing the success that women leaders in the industry have demonstrated in growing Florida's economy and diversifying an already tremendous workforce.

## What are some exciting things on the horizon in the utilities industry that may create opportunities for the next generation of workforce talent?

The utility industry is in the midst of transformation due to technology disruption, which makes this once-sleepy industry a truly exciting place to be both now and for the next generation. At JEA, we are innovating in all areas of our business, from using a proprietary augmented operational intelligence solution for our water and wastewater system, which provides real-time intelligence to better respond to a storm event to testing new water purification technologies designed to ensure the sustainability of northeast Florida's primary water supply.

These innovations transform our customers' experience while reducing impact on the environment. We are adding more than 250 MW of solar energy, making Jacksonville one of the largest solar cities in the United States. By transforming our generation fleet, we have reduced our CO2 emissions by 30%. Continuous technology changes like these will continue to reduce impact on the environment.

These transformations mean the jobs of the future won't look like the jobs of yesterday. As we evolve and shape the business to serve the customers of tomorrow, the next generation will continue the dramatic changes in ways we can only begin to imagine. Through all of this disruption, one thing is certain: utilities will continue to touch every life in our community, every single day. That makes this industry a truly inspiring and exciting opportunity for the next generation of talent entering the work force.

## In the course of your career, can you recall a particular moment when it truly clicked for you that energy is the place to be?

I have been inspired by this industry from the very beginning of my career at the World Bank, where I was fortunate to witness just how vital infrastructure services are to the survival of every single person on this planet.

The business became a higher calling for me, however, the first time I experienced a major weather event while working at JEA. After a storm hits, the entire Northeast Florida community looks to JEA to restore power across our vast 900 sq. mile service area. Our operational performance is never more critical than when the lights go out, and I am inspired by the selfless dedication, perseverance, and commitment of our team to provide outstanding service during our community's most significant hour of need. It is one of the reasons we invest so much in preparing for storms each year, whether through hardening our systems or educating our customers. We are committed to being at our best when our community needs us most.

*"We are committed to being at our best when our community needs us most."*

## Looking ahead, what challenges do you expect for the energy industry and how can we overcome them?

For decades, this industry has been driven by two values: reliability and affordability. Today, while still focused on reliability and affordability, technology disruption forces are changing and reshaping the sector as we know it.

But there is opportunity in every challenge. Despite the many changes in the electric industry, JEA has remained true to its fundamental commitment to its customer-owners by continuing to offer competitive rates, high reliability, public accountability and responsive customer service. We have also embarked on a scenario-based strategic planning process to determine how our 125-year-old utility can continue to meet the demands of and stay relevant to its customers in the face of these challenges. We believe that working together, we can build on our strong past, serve our customers in a responsible manner, and create the future utility we want to become.