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The Great Crew Change

Navigating the Demographic Cliff and the Rising Shadow of an Aging Workforce

In the quiet corridors of public power utilities and the vast networks of joint action agencies, a demographic clock is ticking. For years, the industry has discussed the “aging workforce” as a future concern. However, in 2026, the data confirms that this challenge has arrived with unprecedented velocity, requiring immediate action in succession planning and workforce wellness.

A Converging Storm of Demographics

The public power sector is currently facing a “triple threat” to its operational continuity:

- an aging population,
- a shrinking domestic workforce, and
- a sharp decline in net migration.

According to the 2025 United States Energy & Employment Report (USEER), the energy sector accounts for 5.4% of all U.S. jobs, yet it is disproportionately affected by the “silver tsunami.” Research from the Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD) indicates that 40% of the utility workforce will be eligible for retirement by 2030. This represents a massive exodus of institutional knowledge.

By the Numbers: Sector Breakdown

The impact is felt differently across roles, but no sector is immune:

- **Lineworkers:** Generation X is beginning to age out. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects a need for 73,600 new electricians annually through 2032 just to replace retirees.
- **Managers and Policy Makers:** The tenure gap is stark. Workers aged 55–65 typically stay for 9.9 years, while those aged 25–34 stay for just 2.8 years, making leadership grooming difficult.
- **Macro Trends:** The Brookings Institution reported that net migration to the U.S. turned near-zero in late 2025, wiping out the labor breakeven previously relied upon to fill entry-level gaps.



Extending the Career Span: Wellness and Performance

As we encourage experienced professionals to delay retirement, maintaining Work Ability - the capacity to meet physical and mental job demands - is paramount. Research shows that moderate-to-vigorous physical activity provides immediate benefits for sleep and anxiety while reducing long-term risks of chronic disease. Furthermore, a 2026 Yale study found that adults holding positive beliefs about aging showed measurable improvements in cognitive and physical function.

Current trends support this extension: in 2024, one in five people aged 65 and older remained active in the labor force. Many are opting for “phased retirement” with 38.3% of workers aged 65+ working part-time.

The Rising Shadow: Alzheimer’s and Cognitive Health

However, working longer necessitates confronting a growing healthcare reality. Nearly 7 million Americans live with Alzheimer’s, a number set to double by 2050. Critically, biological changes (like amyloid plaque buildup) can begin 20 years before symptoms show, often starting in a person’s 50s. For utility professionals in their peak leadership years, the preclinical stages of the disease may already be present. As we extend career spans, the intersection of high responsibility and early-stage cognitive changes requires proactive health screening and a culture of support.

Conclusion: The Window for Action

The time for joint action agencies and state associations to act is now. By combining aggressive succession planning with a focus on cognitive and physical wellness, we can ensure the baton is passed successfully. The sustainability of community-owned utilities depends on turning this demographic cliff into a successful relay race.

Sources

Demographics & Workforce Statistics:

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Wellness & Aging Trends:

- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), “38.3 percent of employed older Americans worked part time in 2024.” *The Economics Daily* (2025).
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Alzheimer’s and Cognitive Health:

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- National Institute on Aging (NIA), “What Happens to the Brain in Alzheimer’s Disease?” 2025.
- *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, “Preclinical Alzheimer Disease: Definitions and Research Framework,” 2024.
- Mayo Clinic, “Early-onset Alzheimer’s: When symptoms begin before age 65,” 2025.



HCI's 2026 Annual Gathering – Expanded Gallery

The April Newsletter shared some photos from the HCI Annual Gathering held in Denver, Colorado from April 8-9. The meeting focused primarily on the Affiliates and provided thought-provoking speakers with quality insights, several engaging interactive sessions, and several excellent networking opportunities.

This month we want to share a few more photos of the event.



(L to R) Michael Vigeant with GreatBlue Research, Monty Hanks with NCPA, Ken Noland with VPPSA, Kevin Gadden, Retiree from IMEA.



Robbie Tugwell from PowerSecure.



(L to R) Doug Westlund with Acumen and Randy Howard with NCPA.



(L to R) Mark McCain from HCI, Grace Sawyer with VPPSA, Marc Gerken from HCI.



(L to R) Brad Lingen with MRES and Scott Durham with Katama.



(L to R) Ken Nolan, VPPSA and Kevin Gaden, Retiree from IMEA.



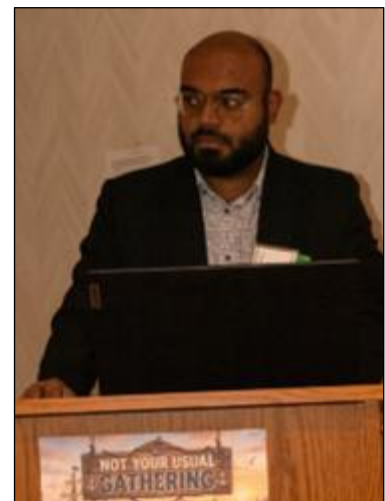
(L to R) Robbie Tugwell from PowerSecure, Mark Ennis from Energy Southeast, speaking to Annette DuPont-Ewing, HCI.



Mark Ennis form Energy Southeast and Nicole Kubik with Nebraska Municipal Power Pool.



Monty Hanks with NCPA



Oswald Palmer from Acumen gave a presentation.



Elizabeth Bendele with Florida Municipal Electric Association.



Brad Lingen with MRES and Houston Andreades with SpryPoint.



(L to R, Top to Bottom) Grace Sawyer with VPPSA, Bob Banks, UFS. Nicole Kubik with NMPP, Jeff Haas with APPA, Mark McCain, HCI, Branndon



Mary Malone with Questline Digital.



(L to R) Oswald Palmer, Loreto Sarracini, and Doug Westlund, all from Acumen.



Bob Banks from UFS.



Doug Westlund from Acumen and Randy Howard from NCPA.

Nautical Dinner. On the first night of the conference, a nautical-themed dinner was hosted by HCI and HCI's Partners. First prize for best outfit was awarded to Houston Andreades from SpryPoint.



Nicole Kubik with NMPP.



(L to R) Kevin Gaden, Retiree from IMEA, Hoston Andreades, from SpryPoint and Marc Gerken from HCI.



Grace Sawyer with



Jeff Haas with APPA.



Maureesha Dillard with Residence Inn.



Mary Malone with Questline Digital.



Elizabeth Bendele with FMEA and Doug Westlund with Acumen.

Nautical Dinner – Continued.



(L to R) Loreto Sarracini, Acumen, Annette DuPont-Ewing, HCI, and Brad Lingden with MRES.



Annette DuPont-Ewing with HCI and Robbie Tugwell with



(L to R) Steve Stodden with MPUA. Annette DuPont-Ewing with HCI, and Doug Healy with Healy Law.



(L to R) Mark Ennis with Energy Southeast, Annette DuPont-Ewing and Mark McCain both from HCI.

AI Data Centers and Alzheimer's Disease

The demand for Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to increase and tech companies are building increasingly more data centers to accommodate the huge demand and evolving need. According to a segment on the CBS Morning Show aired April 19, 2026, “there are over 4000 data centers in operation across the country, and those centers require large amounts of land, water, and power.” According to the facts posted on CBS’ The Money Issue, “the cost of a building a large data center can run from \$500 million to \$20 billion, depending on wattage.” **This fact directly relates to utility companies illustrating the immense capital intensity and power requirements of AI-driven infrastructure. As with everything, there are two sides to every story, and public utility companies are often caught in the middle.**

Opponents are concerned about the impact that data centers will have on the environment, the increased cost for electric utilities that will be passed on to the consumer, and the inevitable changes that will occur in the area. Most data centers are being built in low-density areas, areas where people enjoy the quality of life that small towns offer. Currently the industry is unregulated, and changes are happening at such a quick pace that opponents fear they will reach a point of no return with permanent impacts. On March 25, 2026, Senator Bernie Sanders advocated that Congress put a moratorium on building new data centers until regulations have been put in place.

Advocates say that the data centers bring money and jobs to small towns, increased tax revenue that will be used to improve local infrastructure. Others point to strengthening the global economy. According to an April 27, 2026, segment on NBC’s The Today Show, AI can improve quality of life, improving healthcare and senior care - specifically focusing on its role in managing Alzheimer’s. They pointed out that currently Alzheimer’s researchers are working in silos and AI can be used to gather the information from multiple research studies to facilitate sharing of important information that could lead to finding a solution faster.

A segment on NBC Boston aired March 16, 2026, and talked about using AI for early detection in Alzheimer's care. AI tools are now capable of analyzing eye scans or speech patterns to identify high-risk patients, years before symptoms become severe, with some studies showing high accuracy in detecting early signs. While AI serves as a powerful engine for early detection and daily management, it is intended to augment, not replace, the essential human touch of doctors and “would not be used to make clinical decisions, but can be used to inform them.”

References:

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- <https://www.nbcboston.com/video/on-air/as-seen-on/how-ai-is-helping-researchers-predict-alzheimers-disease/3916675/>.
- *TIME*, Nadan Lad and Murali Doraiswamy, 04/27/26.
- <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/facts-figures>.



HCI Board of Directors Member STEVE STODDEN, P.E.



Steve Stodden serves as a Board Member of Hometown Connections, Inc. He is President & CEO at Missouri Public Utilities Alliance (MPUA.) Beyond his impressive professional credentials as a Professional Engineer and industry veteran, Steve is widely respected for his steady practicality. In an industry that faces constant regulatory and technological shifts, Steve remains a voice of reason. He approaches complex governance challenges with an even-keeled demeanor that fosters consensus and clarity, ensuring the board stays focused on meaningful community impact.

His leadership style is defined by a grounded, common-sense approach that simplifies the complex, making him a trusted advisor and a stabilizing force within the HCI leadership team. According to Marc Gerkin, CEO, Hometown Connections, Inc.:

“Steve Stodden is an invaluable asset to the Hometown Connections Board of Directors. His transition from Chief Energy Officer to President & CEO at MPUA only reinforces what we already knew: Steve possesses a rare depth of technical mastery and executive vision. Having managed everything from power generation to transit and gas operations over a distinguished 25-year career at City Utilities, he brings a comprehensive ‘utility-wide’ lens that is essential for the strategic guidance we provide to our members.”

Until February 2025, Steve served as MPUA’s Chief Energy Officer. Steve was previously Vice President at City Utilities of Springfield. He was employed at City Utilities for over 25 years. During that time, he managed Power Generation, Power Marketing, Gas & Water Engineering, Gas Operations, Water Operations, Transit, Fleet and Facilities. Prior to City Utilities, he was an electrical engineer for the Power Division of Black & Veatch for six years. Steve holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from Iowa State University. One of his favorite things about MPUA is the positive community impact. Steve believes that the actions at MPUA directly benefit the citizens of our MPUA communities for decades to come.

About MPUA

Missouri Public Utility Alliance (MPUA) represents community-owned (municipal), locally regulated electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, and broadband utilities that work together for the benefit of their customers. For many years, the vision of a strong, versatile, and multi-faceted collaboration grew in the minds of municipal utility leaders from across Missouri. In October of 1998, three current member

organizations of MPUA voted to combine efforts and resources to better serve their municipal utility members. MPUA is a partnership with the Missouri Joint Municipal Electric Utility Commission, the Missouri Gas Commission, the Missouri Association of Municipal Utilities, and the MPUA Resource Services Corporation. Each of the partners adopt a budget and have their own legal status. Thirteen members of the organizations serve on the MPUA Board of Directors and provide overall operational insight, and collectively this provides a broad array of services to all members.

Contact Information for Missouri Public Utility Alliance

Address: 2200 Maguire Boulevard, Columbia, MO 65201

Phone: 573-445-3279

Email: info@MPUA.org

Website: <https://mpua.org/>



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Upcoming 2026 Conferences

- May 11-13** **PLMA Spring Conference, Indianapolis, IN**
<https://flexload.org/conference/spring-2026-plma-conference/>
- May 14-15** **IMEA-IMUA-IPEA Annual Conference and Trade Show**
<https://www.imea.org/IMEA%20Upcoming%20Events.asp?id=49>
- May 18-21** **Northwest Public Power Association Annual Conference, Spokane, WA**
<https://www.nwppa.org/conferences/annual-conference-and-membership-meeting/>
- June 1-3** **Energy Southeast (SEEA) Annual Member Meeting, Reston, VA**
<https://www.seealliance.org/event/2026-annual-member-meeting/>
- June 1-4** **CleanPower 2026 Conference, Houston, TX**
<https://cleanpower.org/expo/>
- June 2-4** **EEl Annual Meeting 2026, Las Vegas, NV**
https://www.eei.org/Events/_Local/eei-annual-meeting
- June 7-9** **Palmetto Power Cities Annual Meeting, Hilton Head, SC**
<https://www.masc.sc/event/palmetto-power-cities-annual-meeting>
- June 16-17** **NPPA Accounting & Finance Conference, Missoula, MT**
<https://www.nwppa.org/conferences/accounting-finance-conference/>
- June 23-25** **Transmission & Interconnection Summit, Washington, DC**
<https://www.infocastinc.com/event/transmission-interconnection>
- Jun 26-Jul1** **American Public Power Association National Conference, Boston, MA**
<https://www.publicpower.org/national-conference>
- July 5-8** **ECA Annual Meeting and Governmental Affairs Conference, Gulf Shores, AL**
<https://www.electriccities.org/event/annual-meeting-and-governmental-affairs-conference/>
- July 14-16** **Florida Municipal Electric Association Annual Meeting, Palm Beach, FL**
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/fmea-2026-annual-conference>
- July 14-17** **Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association Annual Meeting, Knoxville, TN**
TBD

To have your conference listed, please send information to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com

Upcoming 2026 Conferences (continued)

- July 15-17** **TMEPA Annual Meeting, Knoxville, TN**
<https://tmepa.org/event/annual-meeting/>
- Aug 17-19** **Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association Annual Summer Conf, Saint Cloud, MN**
<https://www.mmua.org/summer-conference>
- Sep 22-24** **Trees and Utilities National Conference, Portland, OR**
<https://www.treesandutilities.org/>
- Sep 23-25** **Northern California Power Agency Annual Conference, Olympic Valley, CA**
TBD
- Sept 29-30** **Michigan Municipal Electric Association Annual Conference, Battle Creek, MI**
Contact MMEA directly at (517) 323-8446.
- Oct 7-9** **Missouri Public Utility Alliance Annual Conference, Branson, MO**
<https://mpua.org/page/annualconference>
- Oct 12 -14** **AMP Annual Conference, Columbus, OH**
<https://www.amppartners.org/services/annual-conference/>
- Oct 19-21** **Electric Cities of Alabama Engineering & Operations Conference, Birmingham, AL**
<https://www.electriccities.org/event/engineering-and-operations-conference/>
- Oct 20-22** **TMEPA Fall Engineering & Operations Conference, Nashville, TN**
TBD
- Oct 20-23** **GridSecCon, Orlando, FL**
<https://www.nerc.com/programs/e-isac/gridseccon>
- Oct 25-28** **APPA Customer Connections Conference, Nashville, TN**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/customer-connections-conference>
- Nov 3-4** **FMEA Energy Connections Conference & Trade Show, Tampa, FL**
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/fmea-2026-energy-connections-conference-and-trade-show>
- Nov 8-11** **NARUC Annual Meeting & Education Conference, Puerto Rico**
<https://www.naruc.org/events/all-events/2026-naruc-annual-meeting-and-education-conference/>

To have your conference listed, please send information to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com

When all Vendors Look the Same, Trust Matters.



HCI excels at providing fully-vetted, top quality vendors to all size of Public Power Utilities.

www.hometownconnections.com

When Every Vendor Looks the Same, Trust is the Ultimate Differentiator

In a marketplace crowded with similar technical specifications and service tiers, the Trust Factor often becomes the only true differentiator. For small to medium-sized public power utilities, the stakes of a new partnership are incredibly high. Unlike larger investor-owned entities, community owned utilities often lack the excess bandwidth or budget to recover from a vendor that overpromises and under-delivers.

When all vendors look the same - Trust Matters. That's where Hometown Connections excels - providing fully vetted, top-quality vendors hand-picked specifically for the needs of public power.

Hometown Connections acts as a protective filter, performing the deep-dive due diligence so your staff doesn't have to. We focus on three core strengths to ensure your success:

- **The Due Diligence Heavy Lifting:** We invest thousands of hours in vetting partners, ensuring you aren't just looking at a directory, but a curated list of proven performers.
- **Built for the Missing Middle:** We select vendors who understand the unique operational DNA of smaller utilities, avoiding scaled down products that don't fit your local requirements.
- **The Power of Community:** Because public power is a tight-knit community, our partners are chosen, proven in the trenches, and respected by your peers.

Ultimately, it is about more than just a contract; it is about the peace of mind that comes from knowing your partners are as committed to your community's resilience as you are.

HCI Blog

HCI Blog: A Platform for Collaboration and Innovation

<https://blog.hometownconnections.com/>

HCI warmly invites all its Partners and Affiliates to actively contribute to the blog. Whether it's sharing a recent project, providing commentary on industry trends, or offering advice based on your experiences, your input is highly valued. This collaborative effort will not only highlight the incredible work being accomplished across the network but also provide a valuable resource for continuous learning and development.

How to Contribute

Contributing to the HCI blog is straightforward. Interested Partners and Affiliates need to follow these simple steps:

- **Write your article:** Focus on topics that you are enthusiastic about and that would benefit the HCI community or public power in general.
- **Submit your article:** Send your completed article to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com.

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Hometown Connections, Inc. is a national, non-profit utility services organization specializing in the unique challenges facing community-owned utilities. For more than 25 years, HCI has helped municipal systems transform their processes and systems by facilitating access to industry-leading technology, services, and consulting.

Owners

- American Municipal Power, Inc.
- Energy Southeast
- Missouri Public Utility Alliance
- Northern California Power Agency
- Vermont Public Power Supply Authority

Marketing Affiliates

- Energy Northwest
- Florida Municipal Electric Association
- Illinois Municipal Electric Agency
- Indiana Municipal Utilities Agency
- Michigan Municipal Electric Association
- Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association
- Missouri River Energy Services
- Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma
- Nebraska Municipal Power Pool
- Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
- Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association
- Texas Public Power Association

Sales Affiliates

- American Municipal Power, Inc.
- ElectriCities of North Carolina
- Energy Southeast
- Indiana Municipal Power Agency
- Missouri Public Utility Alliance
- Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority
- Piedmont Municipal Power Agency

Partners

- Acumen
- DivDat
- Energy Southeast, A Cooperative District
- Exacter
- Great Blue
- Hometown Connections
- Katama Technologies, Inc.
- Leverage Leadership
- Marsh USA
- MFP Connect
- PowerSecure
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- Mark McCain, Exec. Consultant for Strategic Planning
- Annette DuPont-Ewing, Director of Marketing
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