



Cooperative CONNECTION

News for the customers of Columbus Light & Water | Special Edition Summer 2021

Experienced Columbus native finds career calling at CL&W

Angela Verdell says inclusion and team building has been key to success

The chance to incorporate her unique blend of skillsets at CLW was a timely opportunity for Angela Verdell, Ph.D. The newly appointed General Manager of Columbus Light and Water has a broad range of experience and expertise across different industry sectors, which are ideal for her new role. With a background in engineering, finance, and public policy and administration, Dr. Verdell has a proven track record in leadership and operational efficiency and effectiveness with her prior employers including Entergy Nuclear Power, Shell Oil Company, Johnson & Johnson, and Mississippi State University.

Throughout her experiences, Dr. Verdell has always been a champion of process improvement, equity and inclusion, and personnel development and advancement.

“While working across multiple industries, I quickly learned that it takes strong teams to yield great results,” reflects Dr. Verdell. “I’m passionate about developing and implementing policies and processes that result in effective teams and quality outcomes. Teams that are provided the right resources, and opportunities are better equipped to exceed customers’ expectations.”

We sat down with Dr. Verdell in a Q&A session to learn more about her background, career goals, inspirations, and advice for future leaders.



Angela Verdell, Ph.D., CL&W General Manager

Q&A with Dr. Verdell

How are you doing in the midst of the pandemic?

I am doing ok as well as my family. We are following the CDC guidelines and encouraging those around us to do the same. We have been able to safely celebrate family milestones like high school and college graduations. This has been a time of valuable family time and reflecting on what’s important.

What do you hope to achieve in your new position?

Above all else, it is important that we always maintain a safe

working environment. Initially, I want to create a welcoming work culture where every person feels valued. After establishing baseline operational performances, we will work to identify opportunities to produce greater efficiency and effectiveness where possible. Using data analysis and evaluations will be essential in driving innovation and process improvement. Ultimately my goal is to continue to provide safe and reliable services to our customers and community; ensure a commitment to equity and inclusion throughout our

Q&A with Dr. Verdell

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organization and supply chain; and to help those around me realize their fullest potential.

Can you tell us about your background and what attracted you to CL&W?

I was raised in Columbus and attended Columbus City Schools. I received a Bachelor of Science degree in Finance from Jackson State University, and I am a two-time alumnus of Mississippi State University with a Master of Science in Industrial and Systems Engineering and a Doctorate of Public Policy and Public Administration.

When the general manager position became available, it was a perfect fit for my blended experiences and the position also fulfilled my desire to continue to work within the public sector to help create the greatest good for the greatest number of people. I am excited to work within our community to further improve our quality of life through utility services.

What does being the first African American and female General Manager mean to you?

It's an honor to be selected to serve in this position. There are so many who paved the way for women and people of color to work in technical industries, and at this level. It is humbling yet empowering and I am committed to do the best job



while promoting an inclusive culture. I believe this is a key component to any organization's success.

Who inspires you, whether in your community, professionally, or personally?

Not to sound like a cliché, but my mother is the most inspirational person in my life. My siblings and I grew up on the south side of Columbus. We come from humble beginnings. However, it is the values she instilled in us that shaped us to be the persons we are today. The lessons I learned from her, I also applied when raising my own children. 'Do it right the first time so you won't have to do it over again' is one of those principles that resonates with everything that I do.

What's been one of your proudest achievements?

Outside of my family, I would have to say

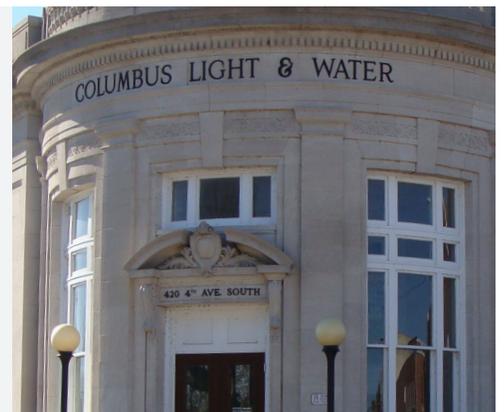
that earning my Ph.D. has been one of my proudest achievements. When I realized the importance of what I needed in my field, I made a personal decision to take on the challenge and rigor. It is not just dedication but it is also determination that is needed to complete the program. Once I started it, I had to finish. There was not another option for me.

What advice do you have for our youth and future leaders?

Know your worth and your value. Place yourself in positive positions and do everything that you can to help other people. It is never about where you are from. It is all about what you are doing and where you are headed. Honestly, I just hope that I can be of some inspiration to someone who looks at my starting point in life and says if she can do then so can I.

LOBBY CLOSED Drive-thru Open

Effective immediately - For your protection and ours, we are closing our lobby to visitors until further notice due to the rise of COVID-19 cases. Our customers can pay their bills online, by phone, at our drive-thru, or at local kiosks throughout the city. For more information, visit our website at www.columbuslw.com or call us at (662) 328-7192, option 3.



Fiber Optics: Bridging the Gap

Last year, when the pandemic forced many schools and communities to shut down, it exposed a host of challenges in the digital gap. One of the greatest problems that continue to exist: Students can't keep up with their academics when there is no internet access at home. When school participation and homework assignments are required because of virtual learning or needing internet access beyond the classroom, the "digital divide" is widened between connected and unconnected students. School districts and local government have scrambled to provide temporary fixes such as accessing wifi hotspots from school buildings, public and private parking lots, and school buses.



Utility workers installing fiber-optic lines underground

Forward thinking

Realizing the digital gap would continue to exist beyond the pandemic, Columbus Light and Water (CL&W) is looking to establish a more permanent solution with a municipal broadband fiber-optics network that would not only benefit students, but also residents, businesses, and utility services.

"Our goal is to create a reliable, affordable, and faster internet access network for our community, especially in underserved areas and low-income households," said Angela Verdell, General Manager of CL&W. "We are upgrading our internal network of fiber-optic cables for internal communications and utilization as well as creating an opportunity for all of our residential and business customers to have high speed internet access. The planning for this project has been in the making for several years with our Board of Commissioners. Upgrading 26 miles of our fiber infrastructure across the city will offer long lasting benefits to everyone well beyond the pandemic."

CL&W has partnered with Columbus Municipal School District and Columbus

Housing Authority for a cost share opportunity to install fiber optic line drops for residents who request internet access. "It was an easy decision for us to invest in this worthy cause," said Debra Taylor, Executive Director of Columbus Housing Authority. "A large percentage of our families without internet access have children who attend Columbus schools and they can't complete school assignments from home. Having internet access is essential as having water and electricity. This investment is just a starting point for our families to engage and explore more opportunities to enrich their lives. Not only will this benefit our students, but it will also help our seniors with telehealth, college students for online courses, home-based businesses and our computer center." Columbus Housing Authority is sharing the cost of the fiber-optics project and is working towards allocating approximately \$600,000 to deliver high-speed broadband services to its residents.

Next steps

Mississippi law allows electric cooperatives to expand existing infrastructure including fiber-optic and enhanced grid investments to provide broadband services, which

makes CL&W's project possible.

Next month, CL&W will request the City of Columbus, Mississippi through its Mayor and City Council to issue bonds through the Mississippi Development Bank in order to provide funds for the improvement of CLW's Electricity System, including the construction and/or installation of approximately 26 miles of new broadband fiber to replace the existing fiber network, a partnership with the school system and housing authority for the provision of a broadband fiber network, installation of a new electricity transformer, capital improvement upgrades, acquisition of certain buildings for housing the Department's fiber optic network system, parking lots and the construction of additional bays at the Department headquarters, in addition to the construction of an electrical warehouse communication bomb shelter of which the total cost should not exceed \$8,700,000.

The bonds for the project would be secured by revenues from CL&W customers at a 1.4% rate increase. CL&W anticipates an approximately \$3.00 per month increase in customer bills. CL&W would be responsible for making debt service payments on the bonds and not the City.

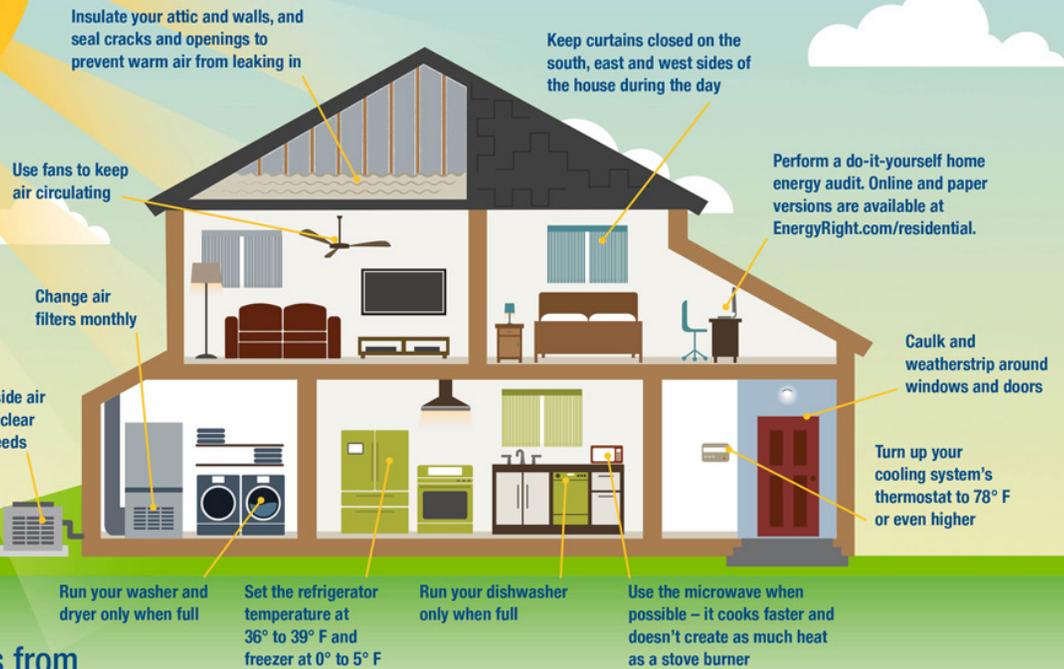


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Summer Energy Tips

Saving energy from the inside out.



Look for additional tips from your local power company and TVA at EnergyRight.com

