

c nnected

COWLITZ PUD CELEBRATES 90 YEARS OF POWERING COWLITZ COUNTY

continued from February's Connected

A Storm and a Strike

On October 12, 1962, radio reporter Vern Eaton was heading out to cover Friday night football when the weather took a dramatic turn. “The sky looked funny,” he recalled. “Across the street, a huge sign just folded, and the wind hit. Oh my gosh.” At home later, he said, “the wind shook our house.”

That day became known as the Columbus Day Storm, though the weather pattern was technically Hurricane Frieda. For lineman Sid Nelson, the storm arrived just as he was preparing to end his shift.

“We were quitting,” he said. “But most of the guys got called in right away, while the storm was howling. Some of us never got home that evening. We quit at two in the morning. There was no way we were going to fix everything that night.”

One urgent job stands out in Nelson’s memory. Near the California Way tunnel under the railroad tracks, a downed tree had taken out a pole and blocked the road. A power line lay across the tunnel, the electric pump had failed, and water was rising fast.

“We finally got the road open,” he said. “To some people, we were heroes—but that was a minor thing that night. There were trees down everywhere.”

When he finally made it home, it was to a dark house like the rest of Cowlitz County. Crews worked around the clock for days. “Our families took it in stride,” Nelson said. “My kids grew up knowing what was going on. And my wife had worked for the telephone company—she understood how critical it all was.”



Cowlitz PUD assesses damage caused by the 1962 Columbus Day Storm

A Different Kind of Storm: The 1977 Strike

Another challenge arrived years later with the **1977 labor strike**. Employees were frustrated that contract negotiations repeatedly dragged on long past expiration, yet they continued working without an agreement.

“This time enough people felt the arrangement wasn’t fair,” Nelson said. “We were already months past the contract. It couldn’t go on like that.”

As a union member, he supported the strike, but he felt communication broke down. “The strike could have been averted,” he said. “Bob McKinney, management at the time, was a hard guy to deal with. If communication had happened, it could have been settled in half an hour.”

The strike put financial strain on many workers. Management staff worked overtime to keep operations running—some doubling or tripling their income in the process. “It wasn’t the fault of just one side,” Nelson said.

Eaton, then on the management side, remembered how employees stepped up. “Denny Robinson and Tim Brown worked on the lines. We just put it together.”

He also faced frustrated customers during the strike. “I was the only one in the office for a long time,” he said. “People were mad because they had to cross picket lines to pay their bills. This was a union town. It was a tough time for everyone. Many people lost not only wages, but months toward their retirement. There were a lot of hard feelings. Was it worth it? I don’t think it was.”

Through it all, Eaton maintained deep respect for lineworkers. “I wouldn’t want their jobs. To be hanging on those lines—7,200 volts...” he said. “Today they have lifts, but back then they climbed poles in the worst weather. I’d be sitting answering phones, and they’d be in Cougar on a pole in a raging snowstorm. They earned their money.”

Looking Back

Despite the storms—literal and otherwise—Sid Nelson says he has nothing but good memories of his years of service.

“Public power is the only way to go,” he said from his quiet retirement apartment. “I had a good profession.”

Continued in next month’s Connected.

Details for this article were made available thanks to former Daily News Editor Cathy Zimmerman.

Have a story, photo, or artifact to share?
Send it to adietz@cowlitzpud.org and tell us how public power has touched your family, neighborhood, or career.



CYBERSECURITY

Fraudulent Fraud Alerts

Cyber criminals use any method they can think of to scam people. Turning cybersecurity against people with deceptive tactics is not new, but it is on the rise. Most financial institutions and many account providers have implemented systems to detect and warn customers of potential fraud. Scammers attempt to take advantage of our efforts to be sure and trick us into giving them vital information such as usernames, passwords, and security codes.



Be aware of fake fraud alerts via e-mail, text, and phone calls. Use the following tips to be safe with fraud alerts:

Know how your financial or other institutions verify fraud. Many companies use automated calls or text messages to verify transactions. If they do, they will never ask for account or credential information.

Never call or text back or reply to an email with the contact details provided. Scammers will provide bad information to impersonate your banks or account providers.

Always use known communication channels. Banks put official contact numbers on cards, account statements, and their websites. Contact the company in these ways.

FREE TAX PREPARATION

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide provides Free Tax Preparation

Longview/Kelso area residents can get their taxes done for free from January 31st -April 11th. AARP membership is not required, and there are no age or income limitations. To make an appointment with IRS Certified AARP Tax-Aide volunteers, call the Longview Library at 360.442.5300 or Lower Columbia CAP at 360.425.3430



CUSTOMER SERVICE

WARM NEIGHBOR PROGRAM

This St. Patrick's Day, spread a little luck and a lot of warmth!

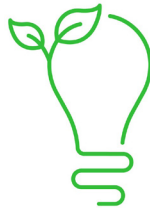
By donating to Warm Neighbor, you're helping local families keep their lights and heat on when times get tough. Every contribution, big or small, brings comfort, stability, and hope to our community.



Be a lucky charm for a neighbor in need. Warm a home today!

You can support local families in need by enrolling in Warm Neighbor Donations through SmartHub!

Go to Billing→Warm Neighbor to choose whether you'd like to round up your bill each month or donate a set amount. Every little bit helps make a difference in our community!



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

RENEWABLE ENERGY CREDITS

What Are Renewable Energy Credits (RECs)?

RECs make it easy to support clean energy—even if you rent or live somewhere without green power options.

What they represent:

1 REC = 1 megawatt-hour (MWh) of renewable electricity (wind, solar, hydro) delivered to the grid.



Why they exist:

Once renewable energy enters the grid, you can't tell which electrons are "green." RECs act as proof that clean energy was generated.



Why it matters:

Individuals can support renewable energy from anywhere. Businesses use RECs to meet sustainability goals and to achieve carbon neutrality.



Ready to make an impact? Purchase RECs for your home or business through Bonneville Environmental Foundation: <https://store.b-e-f.org/>

Celebrating 90 Years

Connected is published by Cowlitz PUD

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Board of Commissioners meets the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 2pm.

To attend contact mpetterson@cowlitzpud.org