

# KPUD Recognizes Over 80 Years of Service with Three Key Retirements

In a day and age when the average employee tenure is four years, these three retiring employees exemplify dedication to public power.

Klickitat PUD strives to recruit and retain people that want to make a career at the utility, so we celebrate accomplishments like these. KPUD wishes Lori Fakesch, Dan Charters and Jeff Thayer the best in their retirements. They will be missed.

### **Lori Fakesch, Billing Clerk**

Lori Fakesch, a cornerstone of Klickitat PUD's customer service team, is retiring at the end of June after dedicating 27 years of service to the utility.

Lori began her career with KPUD in July 1996, after working at Champion Saw Mill for 16 years.

"Doug Miller encouraged me to apply for the opening in the water-wastewater department, so I did," she says.

Lori began her career as maintenance in the water-wastewater department, collecting water samples for testing. She moved into the customer service department as a meter reader, where she was responsible for collecting meter reads on monthly routes.

"Lori has a wealth of knowledge about the utility, but her dedication to the customer service team is what I appreciate the most," says Brandy Myers, KPUD customer and accounting service manager. "She's been in the field as a meter reader, on the front line as a customer service representative and worked her way to the billing clerk position."

"I've really liked the interaction with people," Lori says.

As the billing clerk, she provided timely accurate customer bills, coordinating with service personnel and customers to address any issues before sending out monthly bills. She also developed quality working relationships with external agencies to coordinate customer assistance.

"She's a hardworker, dedicated, loves her family and loves her co-workers like family," says Shelby Manka, a co-worker and friend. "She's known by many customers and will be missed by them, but most of all her willingness to jump in and help with her positive can-do attitude will be missed by her co-workers. She's the light in a room and always willing to lend a hand or an ear. She's been seen as a fun mother figure by many employees."

"I have very much enjoyed my 27 years at KPUD—watching co-workers' families grow to be successful adults and start families of their own," Lori says. "I feel I have met my lifelong friends here, and that's what I will miss the most."

In addition to her many years of service at the utility, Lori served on the Klickitat School Board for 30 years and the Klickitat County Fair Board for more than a decade. She was honored as the 2008 Volunteer of the Year by the Klickitat County Fair Board for her outstanding dedication and commitment.

Lori plans to remain in Klickitat County, but has many future travel plans, including a cruise to Catalina Island this summer and a trip to Yellowstone in the fall. She looks forward to spending



**Lori Fakesch, here with her two grandkids, is retiring after 27 years with KPUD.**

more time with her two grandchildren.

### **Dan Charters, Meter Reader**

Meter Reader Dan Charters will hand over his read routes at the end of June, after dedicating 33 years to KPUD in the White Salmon area.

Dan began his career with KPUD in 1990 after working at NAPA Auto Parts and Hood River Supply. Dan says he applied to KPUD because it seemed like a good place to work and to advance his career. He started as a meter reader and moved up to customer service field representative.

Dan's responsibilities include reading most of the routes in the White Salmon district, which takes him from Glenwood to Dallesport throughout the month. Additionally, he fields some customer requested service work and collection activities. Dan is often called upon for line patrols during storms, helps complete underground locates when needed and is always willing to lend a hand whenever requested.

Brandy Myers first met Dan during a safety meeting over 10 years ago.

"A customer letter was being read to the group, thanking our meter reader for going above and beyond with an act of kindness," she says. "The meter reader saw an older customer struggling to mow his lawn. So when he was off the clock, he returned to the customer's house and completed the task and more. At that time, I didn't know Dan Charters, but I wanted to, because I appreciated his kindness and this good Samaritan act."

Since then, Dan has continued to build relationships with customers and peers.

"Whenever I'm covering Dan's routes, customers stop to ensure he's doing alright," says Matt Olson, a fellow meter reader.



**LEFT: Dan Charters has worked at KPUD since 1990. Jeff Thayer has worked more than 20 years with KPUD.**

One of the things Matt appreciates about Dan is his knowledge of meter locations.

“He can guide me to the hard to find meters over the phone based on memory,” Matt says.

Dan’s favorite parts of his job include being out in the community and his conversations with customers, making friends with customer pups who remember him from his recurring meter reading routes, and seeing some of the most scenic parts of our county. We are pretty sure every dog and most customers in the district will miss seeing Dan. One of Dan’s funniest and most memorable moments out in the field was when a customer’s pet raccoon jumped on the hood of his truck and started playing with his windshield wipers.

One thing on Dan’s bucket list for retirement is a road trip along Route 66. In retirement Dan will relocate to Idaho to be near some of his family. Don’t worry—you will still see Dan in the gorge from time to time when he visits his family here.

### **Jeff Thayer, Material Manager**

At the end of May, longtime KPUD employee Jeff Thayer retired after a career spanning two decades.

Jeff previously worked at a red rock crushing facility running equipment in his high school years, and with Boise Cascade’s sawmill during college. He also spent 14 years working at the Goldendale Aluminum Plant.

As the plant was preparing to shut down, he heard about a job opportunity in the KPUD engineering department.

“The opportunity to come work here has been fantastic,” he says.

Jeff began his career with KPUD as a staking engineer in June 2002. Then he worked as an assistant operations manager and then ultimately accepted the materials manager position in 2015.

During his time in the operations department, he attended Bismarck Community College and pursued an online two-year program—which he completed in eight months—specific to utility power management with a specialty in operations.

As the materials manager, Jeff’s duties included procuring and managing materials, upkeep of building and grounds, fleet

management (which followed him from operations), warehousing and building remodels. Supply chain shortages were especially difficult, and might have been the hardest function he’s had since working at KPUD.

Jeff has been especially appreciative of the Board’s recognition of these hard times and the support he continues to garner from them. Their support has allowed him to set KPUD up with several years’ worth of inventory and secure multiyear contracts from vendors to set his successor up to flourish.

During his time at KPUD Jeff completed customer service remodels in both the Goldendale and White Salmon offices, implemented new safety measures and helped modernize our buildings. He also worked hard to keep the fleet running when funds were tight and has replaced all of the big trucks in the fleet in recent years. The standing joke was Jeff would retire when the last red truck was sold, but he decided 21 years was plenty, and the red trucks outlasted him.

Additionally, he was involved in a part of the LFGII project, 230kV transmission lines and wind farm construction, and the expansions of the offices.

“Over his career at the PUD,” KPUD General Manager Jim Smith says, “Jeff has consistently shown, through his work and in the service of others, a loyalty and commitment to his community and his colleagues that has made Jeff a respected leader and has made Klickitat PUD a better utility.”

Jeff says his fondest memories are of his time as a staking engineer, “meeting with so many different people in the community and helping them bring power to their parcels. I appreciated the opportunity to work in the field but also network with both old and new customers.”

Sohn Kartes, his successor and former KPUD mechanic, described Jeff as a great boss who has been easy to work with.

Jeff plans to enjoy retirement at his home in Goldendale. He will continue to be involved on the board at the Goldendale Golf Course and to farm seasonally with Dale Thiele. He will also have more time for fishing, golfing, spending time with his wife, Laura, on school breaks, and of course, hunting. ■