

Ogletree Deakins
**BUSINESS LEADER
OF THE YEAR**

FUELING CHANGE

HARRISON'S
POWERFUL STORY,
VISION LIGHT A PATH

By Rebecca Patrick

When asked what his young self would think of all he's achieved, Jeffrey Harrison smiles and reflects momentarily.

"My parents aren't alive. My mom passed away unfortunately when I was 14 and my father when I was a young adult or a little bit older. My dad was incredibly proud just with my graduating from college. I was the first one in my family to do that – my brother and I were the first ones," he shares. "Just awestruck and humbled is what a young Jeff Harrison would say, which is the same thing I say now."

For the last six years, Harrison has been president and CEO of Citizens Energy Group. The utility delivers water to an eight-county Indianapolis area as well as both natural gas and wastewater services to Marion County. That reach covers more than 800,000 people.

"I'm very humbled with respect to the responsibilities that I've been given and, in turn, take this position very seriously and try to do all that I can to serve our community," Harrison remarks. "It's what inspires me then to give back in a number of different ways."

Bricklayer, ballplayer ... engineer

From carrying bricks to being a CEO, it's been quite a journey for Harrison.

His father was a bricklayer in their hometown of Jeffersonville and the younger Harrison got in on the action as a hod carrier.

"(I did) everything on the job except for laying the bricks. So stacking all the bricks or blocks for the bricklayers. I would mix the mud. ... then put it in a bucket and carry it to wherever the brick layers were on the wall," he explains.

He fondly recalls early morning drives to the job site in the summer. "At one point in time, I wanted to be a bricklayer like my father, but as I got into high school and started playing basketball, guidance counselors had different thoughts for me."

In his junior year, he was introduced to Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology. Harrison ranked in the top 10% of his class and his counselor thought he could "do well there." He soon set his sights on a career in engineering.

Harrison's athletic talents were part of the new equation. The leading scorer on the basketball team his senior year of high school, he was recruited as a point guard for Rose-Hulman and played that position his freshman year. Versatile on the court, he spent time at every position but center in his college career.

The dedication Harrison developed as an athlete and the experiences gained laid a strong foundation for him in life.

"There's conflict resolution (who's going to take the shot), team building, camaraderie, chemistry – all of those basic skill sets – that I believe transfer over to the professional environment and can help a person thrive."

Becoming a corporate 'Citizen'

Armed with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, the big city of Indianapolis beckoned with a job at Indianapolis Power & Light (IPL, now AES Indiana). While working there, Harrison's attachment to the utility industry took hold.

"I really admired the critical natural resources that utilities provide to communities,"



Harrison "has a genuine focus on the Indianapolis community," says Mayor Hogsett (right). "We see it during Citizens' annual 'Sharing the Dream' days of service in January during Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Hundreds of Citizens employees come out to places like Douglass Park and leave them looking better than ever. That means a lot to Indianapolis families, but it also has a positive effect on those who serve."



"I enjoy just the challenge of business," Harrison offers. "On a personal note, really it's about spending time with loved ones, family and friends." At the top of that list are his two sons, who are following his footsteps into engineering.

he explains.

"My first job was looking at and modeling the electric system here in Indianapolis and determining when new generation should be constructed. And then what type of generation that should be," he states.

"I was a young engineer helping the organization determine what that balance should look like. I fell in love with performing that work and providing vital utility services to improve and enhance the quality of life and economic development in central Indiana."

A former colleague of his at IPL, Bill Tracy, had moved to Citizens Energy with

the steam and chilled water business that was sold. Harrison stayed in touch with Tracy, who felt he was a "good culture fit and thought I could rise inside the Citizens Energy Group organization."

Harrison was happy at IPL but Tracy finally convinced him, and he's not looked back.

He joined Citizens Energy in 2003 as director of market development and was tasked with trying to grow its thermal business, which involves steam and chilled water. He would ascend the ranks and some 12 years later succeed one of his mentors, Carey Lykins, in the top seat.



Harrison: “We’ve used the mantra of one company, one culture to drive home the importance of working that shared passion towards our overall strategic goals of serving community.”

Two visionary undertakings

Under Harrison’s guidance, Citizens Energy is modernizing utility services to meet the needs of greater Indianapolis.

Started under Lykins and in the home stretch with Harrison, the 28-mile DigIndy tunnel system consists of 18-foot concrete tubes being built 250 feet beneath the city. Once completed in 2024 or 2025 – it’s slightly ahead of schedule with the last tunnel now started – the structure will be a major factor in reducing combined sewer overflows into area waterways.

“It’s impossible to ignore the scope of DigIndy – both the value (\$2 billion) and the size of the tunnel network. The added capacity for reducing overflows during harsh rains is something Indianapolis has needed for a long time,” asserts Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett.

“It’s something that the average resident may not be aware of, but on days with heavy rain, everyone will appreciate the difference. It will additionally serve as a long-term investment in the improvement of our waterways – that’s something else the city has been working towards for some time.”

Another aspect of Citizens’ solution to the overflow problem: Plant 10,000 trees to absorb rain flow. Harrison reports more than half of the trees are in the ground.

The community has already seen the benefits of Citizens taking over the city’s consent decree agreement (with federal and state agencies) for the combined sewer overflow.

“The work (to date) has prevented more than two billion gallons of raw sewage from reaching our rivers and streams – White River and Eagle Creek – over the last three years,” Harrison conveys. “More transformational water quality improvements are ahead as we complete the total system segments over the next four years.”

Retrofitting the quarry adjacent to Geist Reservoir to handle three billion gallons of water ensures the supply and will spur area growth for decades. Citizens Reservoir – which has a surface area of 90 acres

and is 230 feet deep – also will act as a critical buffer against drought.

Filled since the spring with water from Geist Reservoir, up to 30 million gallons of stored water per day can be returned to flow downstream to Citizens’ Fall Creek Water Treatment Plant and White River Water Treatment Plant for processing and distribution throughout central Indiana.

Pandemic compassion

Recognizing the importance of hand washing as an early deterrent to spreading COVID-19, Citizens Energy implemented a policy of reconnecting or not turning off the vital water service for nonpayment – before any government moratorium was issued.

Hogsett says he’s been grateful for Harrison’s thoughtful leadership at Citizens Energy during the pandemic.

“Among Indiana utilities, Citizens instituted one of the first long-term payment plans for families who were struggling due to loss of wages or employment. Jeff was prompt, decisive and correct. It was in nobody’s interest to compound an unprecedented and sustained health emergency with an avoidable interruption in residential services.”

Citizens Energy continues to work with those facing financial hardships, extending payment arrangements up to a year.

Harrison exhibits genuine empathy for those who are struggling. “I’ve walked more than my share of a mile in their shoes. I’ve been on free and reduced lunch, grew up on food stamps ... grew up fairly poor. I get firsthand the struggles that take place in some of these households,” he reveals.

“So we want to make sure that we’re doing everything we can do as an organization for our customers to make sure that we’re providing them the best value that we can for (our) utility services.”

Setting an example

Indianapolis entrepreneur John Thompson is the chairman and

CEO of four businesses, including Thompson Distribution and First Electric Supply. He's impressed by Harrison and works with him on the Business Equity for Indy initiative, which is striving toward a more inclusive culture for the city's Black population and other people of color. Harrison is the group's chair.

"Jeff leads by working so hard himself. He recruits, retains and motivates great talent at Citizens (and beyond). He knows how to pull all those human resources together and develop strategies that work extremely well," Thompson praises.

"That's leadership to me – attracting and retaining the right talent and then motivating them to give all that they can. I don't think there's a better example than that (Business Equity task force), when you look at the leaders there."

Thompson offers an account that he says epitomizes Harrison as a CEO. There was a rescheduled conference in April that both men were slated to attend in Naples, Florida.

"Jeff declined to go because he said, 'Our employees aren't back in the office yet. My employees are not allowed to do things like this. While I would love to be in Florida right now, I just can't do it.' So he wouldn't go on the trip."

Thompson concludes, "That's the kind of leader Jeff is – he leads by example."

Ultimate community partner

For Harrison, his passion around service is personal and hearkens back to those who lifted him up.

"(Much of it) is around what happened to me in my youth, so I really like to focus on organizations that focus on helping people, especially children. I would say anything around education. Anything that provides those wraparound services for our youth and for children are going to garner my attention," he notes.

"I want to make sure that we have got just an incredible community that surrounds us. I'm really passionate about seeing people, especially our young folks, continue to grow and create a great future for themselves."

Harrison sits on the board of Rose-Hulman, the Indianapolis Urban League, Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, United Way of Central Indiana, YMCA of Greater Indianapolis and too many more to mention.

Referencing the Business Equity for Indy initiative that launched in April, he says "it's been very humbling to see businesses in central Indiana come together to focus on what I talk about a lot as justice equity, diversity and inclusion."

Hogsett appreciates the scope of Harrison's impact. "In his role, Jeff does more than call for added diversity in the boardroom – he demonstrates why it is so valuable. Informed voices all the way up and down the corporate ladder lead not only to more profitable companies, but also to companies that better serve our communities. And when your product is something as fundamental as gas or water, serving the whole community becomes paramount."

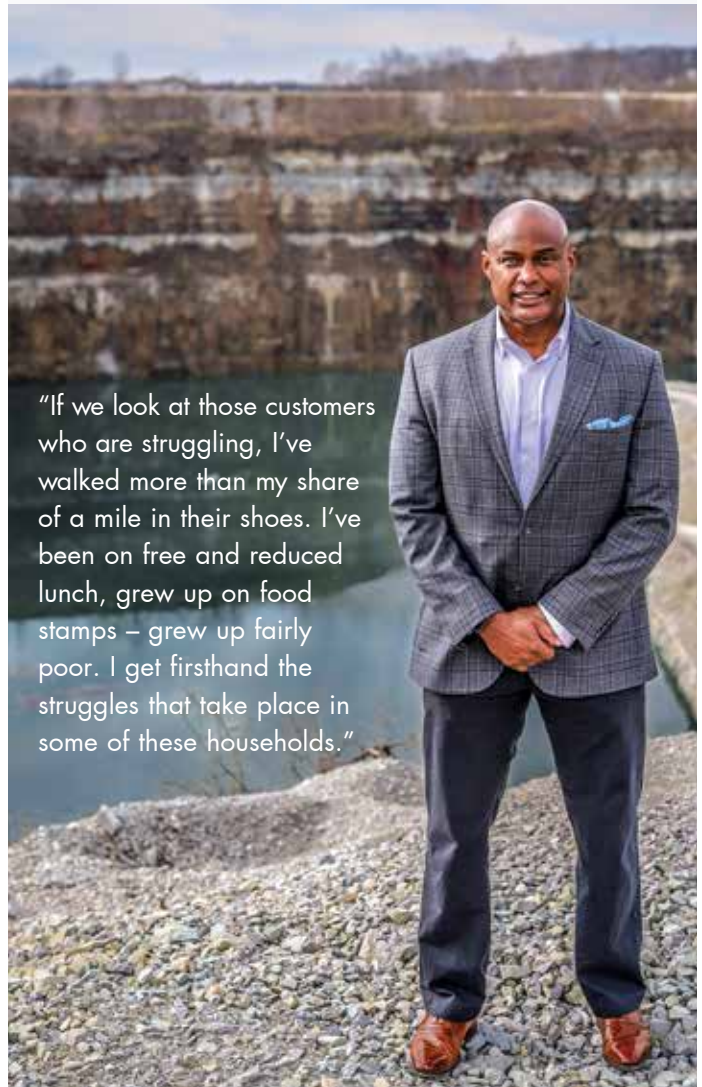
'See someone who looks like them'

Harrison is very aware what his personal story means to people of color: He's a role model – and embraces that responsibility.

"It brings tears to the eyes," he admits. "I'm approached many times by old and young. Sometimes when the older African American members in our community approach, they'll first just stare at me from a distance, and then after a while, they will get the gumption to come up and shake my hand or come up and introduce themselves to me."

"Inevitably, they will tell me how proud they are to see someone who looks like them that sits in the CEO chair and how they thought they would never see that in their lifetime," he discloses.

Citizens Reservoir, located adjacent to Geist Reservoir in McCordsville, will help meet the Indianapolis area's increased demand for water.



"If we look at those customers who are struggling, I've walked more than my share of a mile in their shoes. I've been on free and reduced lunch, grew up on food stamps – grew up fairly poor. I get firsthand the struggles that take place in some of these households."

"You just don't understand how strong the emotions are from those individuals."

For younger parents, "The reaction is often, 'Look, here is someone who looks like you and grew up like you – poor – and was able to do this and become a CEO of an organization,'" he notes.

"I tell everyone that as a young person I never in a million years thought I would become an engineer, much less a CEO. But with the help of so many in my life (it happened). When I speak to young people, I tell them, 'Don't be afraid of hard work.' With some hard work and with the help and leverage of many people you know, this is what can happen."

Becoming a CEO, Harrison emphasizes, shouldn't be viewed as the ultimate mark of success.

"But there are those who take this position and see it as one mark of success. So as a Black CEO, I have to understand that. I have to respect that," he maintains.

"Then with that comes the responsibility of being a role model and a leader in this community – especially for those younger people who are looking towards their own future and looking at people like me to see what they could become." ■