



Energy Efficiency PROGRAM

Diverse Program Ally Incubator Pilot Helps Family Business Flourish



For a quarter of a century, customers in Madison and St. Clair counties have turned to All City Harrison Electric for quality electrical work. Founded by Thomas Harrison, the company is growing in unexpected ways, thanks to a partnership with the Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Program — and one determined daughter.

Kristen Watson, Harrison's daughter, was proud to join the family business in 2014 and eager to carry her own weight. In 2018, Watson helped All City Harrison Electric become a registered Ameren Illinois Program Ally and expand into parking lot LED lighting upgrades. In 2021, Watson jumped at the chance to participate in a unique opportunity - the Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Diverse Program Ally Incubator.

"Going in, I thought it would simply be a good refresher for me on Ameren Illinois Programs and processes, but I was completely blown away with the amount I learned," said Watson, Vice President of Sales & Marketing at All City Harrison Electric. "The experience was so much more valuable than I expected."

Energizing Diverse Program Allies

Ameren Illinois partners with local contractors across its service territory to bring its award-winning Energy Efficiency Program to customers. Known as Program Allies, these contractors are highly skilled and specially trained to implement energy-efficient upgrades and connect customers to cash incentives.

To help small, diverse-owned companies fully capitalize on their Program Ally status, Ameren Illinois partnered with Walker-Miller Energy Services to launch the Diverse Program Ally Incubator in June 2021.

"Ameren Illinois launched the Diverse Program Ally Incubator to help diverse contractors, with limited or no experience in completing energy efficiency projects, to generate sustainable revenue as Program Allies," notes Erika Dominick, Program Manager at Walker-Miller Energy Services. "There is a common misconception that smaller companies don't have the same capabilities as larger companies. It's amazing what they can do when you remove barriers and present them with opportunities."

10 Weeks to Transformation

The Diverse Program Ally Incubator educated and trained five diverse Program Allies on Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Program Offerings. The 10-week Incubator also featured weekly one-on-one business coaching sessions, business education, marketing support, and more.

“The Incubator opened doors I didn't even know were there.”
— Kristen Watson,
All City Harrison Electric

BUILD YOUR BUSINESS WITH AMEREN ILLINOIS

Does your business have room to grow? When you become a registered Ameren Illinois Program Ally, you join an elite statewide network of contractors that are specially trained on the Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Program and listed on our website. As a Program Ally, you'll gain access to free technical training, project and marketing support, and more! In addition, you will be able to offer financial incentives to your customers.

Become a Program Ally and watch your business grow!

Visit AmerenIllinoisSavings.com/Ally to learn more.

“

It's amazing what small businesses can do when you remove barriers and present them with opportunities.

— Erika Dominick,
Walker-Miller Energy Services

”

Watson valued the deep dive into Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Offerings and guidance on how to market them to customers. She also was intrigued by what she learned about non-traditional financing options.

“The Incubator got me thinking about different types of financing, such as product or invoice lending, as well as financing options for customers, too,” said Watson. “It’s nice to know we don’t have to pass up opportunities in the future due to concerns about cash flow.”

Certifiable Support

The Incubator also helped make the daunting diverse-owned certification process more manageable.

“The documentation required to become certified as a diverse-owned business can be overwhelming, and it’s a huge time commitment,” notes Dominick. “We help participants connect the dots and understand the value of certification.”

That expertise and support allowed Watson to follow through on something she had started years before: getting All City Harrison Electric certified as a veteran-owned business, in recognition of her father’s service in the U.S. Air Force.

“I knew it was beneficial to take advantage of the veteran certification program. I looked into the process a few years ago, but became discouraged by the amount of paperwork required,” notes Watson. “The Incubator provided the support and knowledge I needed to follow through.”

As a non-technical person working in a technical business, Watson also valued the support network that formed among Incubator participants.

“We connected on a weekly basis, and it was great to be able to bounce ideas off the other members of the group,” she says.

A Catalyst for Growth

To Watson’s surprise, the Incubator even opened the door to an unexpected opportunity that would leverage the bread-and-butter of their business.

Over the years, the All City Harrison Electric team has developed a unique specialty in the residential market: upgrading obsolete knob-and-tube electrical systems in older homes. Through the Incubator, Watson discovered that Ameren Illinois has set Energy Efficiency Program funds aside specifically for residential knob-and-tube upgrades. All City Harrison Electric is now an approved provider for this work, which helps both the business and low-income customers who don’t have the funds to rewire their homes.

These days, Watson finds herself in the role of recruiter as she seeks to expand the workforce at All City Harrison Electric.

“The Incubator was a huge opportunity for our company. Our growth has been phenomenal,” says Watson. “The Incubator opened doors I didn’t even know were there.”



CONTACT

Angie Ostaszewski
Advisor, Energy Efficiency
Ameren Illinois
aostaszewski@ameren.com



Energy Efficiency
PROGRAM