

Kay Lee led company's effort to support the Atlanta Olympics

By Kay Lee

(Editor's note: Kay Lee served as general manager of Georgia Power's Olympic operations for the Centennial Games that were held in Atlanta in July 1996. Retired from Southern Company since 2002, Lee shares her personal story about this experience below.)

When I first read in 1988 about Billy Payne, the Atlanta lawyer who had the vision to bring the Centennial Games to Atlanta, I knew I wanted to be involved so I wrote him a letter and volunteered to help. Little did I know then how much this Olympic effort would personally and professionally change my life – forever.

After I became involved as an Olympic hostess with the Atlanta Organizing Committee, I got to travel internationally. I first traveled to India to help build relationships with IOC members and then to Tokyo in advance of the Atlanta delegation to prepare facilities, tech support and personnel for the Olympic Congress where Atlanta was named the host city.

A huge responsibility

Because planning for these Centennial Games was a huge responsibility for Atlanta as well as our company, Georgia Power selected me in 1992 to work full-time to lead the company's effort on this project. One of my first tasks was to hire the first of a 50-plus member team that would research and scope out other past Olympic sites in Los Angeles, Lillehammer, Norway; Albertville, Canada; and Barcelona.

As the project manager, I was responsible for developing the overarching strategy for providing energy to one of the most complex projects in the world as well as overseeing its implementation. The strategy was a guide for other Georgia Power departments with front-line responsibility for developing and implementing plans for construction, operations, budgets and marketing.

It was also my responsibility to work with departments throughout Georgia Power to identify the value and approach to the company's sponsorship and hospitality programs, ultimately negotiating and overseeing the company's Olympic sponsorship. In addition, the company constructed a 24/7 control center and a state-of-the-art emergency communication framework.



Through a partnership with the company's economic development team, Georgia Power produced an economic development-based hospitality program with record results, including billions of dollars of investment by corporations. Other partnerships, such as those with the Metropolitan Olympic Games Authority, led to hundreds of millions of dollars in downtown Atlanta investment, resulting in millions of dollars in revenue to Georgia Power.

Georgia Power provided more than 2,000 volunteers

The project was no small task and required a lot of teamwork. Ultimately, 2,000 company employees, spouses, and their children would volunteer in the months surrounding the Games.

While the challenge of building a unique structure, process approach and team to provide a once-in-a-lifetime deliverable on a global stage was a major challenge, our team and company helped to make the Games the success they were. The strategic plan that included keeping the lights on, involving employees as volunteers, and introducing the city and state to global investors to promote economic development in our state was achieved.

While Georgia Power's employees served in many roles during the Games, our company's selection as the Olympic Force Corporation assigned to the opening and closing ceremonies was a real coup.

Employees at this venue helped to sew costumes for the cast, served as stagehands for props, and helped with hospitality. Hundreds of employees, including me, also lined the field in a human matrix to help assemble the thousands of athletes during the Parade of Athletes. Seeing my four children involved on the field in the opening and closing ceremonies was very exciting, too.

Working behind the scenes to keep the lights on

Of course, Georgia Power had many employees working behind the scenes also. These included the linemen who spent their shifts at the venues to ensure a company presence if there was a need, those who assisted with hospitality, security and public relations, and the company's venue managers, who interfaced with ACOG venue managers and monitored the quality of electricity supply at each venue. We even helped find IOC members' children who were in Centennial Olympic Park at the time of the bombing.

As the Official Power Source of the Olympic Games, I believe Georgia Power's performance was inextricably linked to the Games' success. The company's involvement in the Games was good for the city, the state, and its customers and employees.

A dream came true

Before I wrote that letter to Payne, I had never been anywhere outside the United States and not many places within the states.

The Olympics gave me an opportunity for a global experience. Professionally, it gave me an opportunity to witness and manage marketing, hospitality, operations, etc., for a global event. It increased my confidence level in my abilities that came from being trusted and carrying out such an important event for Georgia Power. It also left a positive lasting impression on my family and brought about a set of forever friends in the Atlanta area, across the U.S. and globally, particularly with those members of the IOC and their families who were my first contacts as a volunteer hostess for the Games.

The Olympic Games in Atlanta taught me that you should follow your dream. When I wrote that letter to Payne, I knew that I didn't want to miss the opportunity to get involved in something that interested me. Because of this experience, I encourage others not to miss out on taking a risk because of fear. To work for Georgia Power and be involved in the Centennial Olympics was a dream come true.