

# Seiler remembers being the first to light the 1996 Olympic torch on American soil

Friday, Aug. 12, 2016 – One of the most significant events of the Olympic Games is the carrying of the Olympic torch on its route to its final destination where it ignites the flame to signal the opening of the Games.

While it is an honor most people can only dream about, Swann Seiler actually lived the dream.

Seiler, a corporate communication support manager in Savannah, was chosen to be the very first torch bearer on Georgia soil.

Seiler said the Olympic cauldron was located just outside of the Savannah Electric building and she knew instantly after it was installed that her goal was to be the person who would carry the torch off the ship when it came into the harbor and light the cauldron.

And that is exactly what she did. She applied for the job and on July 9, 1996, carried the torch through the city of Savannah.

The route from the harbor to the cauldron was just under a mile, but Seiler admitted she needed to practice before she could do it.

"The streets were uneven cobblestone," said Seiler. "And while it is always pretty hot in the summer in Savannah, it was especially hot that day – 105 degrees to be exact."

To prepare, Seiler called on a colleague to help.

"A colleague of mine made me a facsimile of the torch so I could practice running in the heat and on the streets," she said. "He made the torch heavier than the actual torch so I would be totally prepared."

On the torch arrival day, a large crowd assembled at the harbor and the world watched as the Olympic icon arrived on American soil.

Billy Payne, the visionary behind Atlanta's bid for the Olympics who ultimately served as president and chief executive officer of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, took the torch off the ship and handed it to Seiler. She then made her way through the crowd and ran down River Street.

"Adrenaline sends you down that aisle," said Seiler as she saw all her coworkers up on the balcony of the Savannah Electric Building cheering her on. "Lighting the cauldron and the crowd cheering was an amazing feeling. I will never forget that day and the tremendous honor."

