

Evolving our business to meet customer needs



Brenda Murray, customer service representative, Brunswick

Thursday, Oct. 20, 2016 – A new chapter begins in the history of Georgia Power today, with a significant shift in the company’s business model to meet changing customer needs and expectations.

At the end of business today, 104 of the company’s 131 business offices will close their doors for the last time. The office closures are the result of customers’ increasing preference for doing business online and their desire for greater flexibility in payment options.

“Without a doubt, this is one of the most important changes we’ve made,” said Louise Scott, vice president of customer service. “We are evolving our company and changing our business to better serve our customers in today’s world.”

Shifting customer needs

The popularity of smartphones and auto pay options are both big drivers of the company’s change in business practices. Electronic payment methods are surpassing the usage of face-to-face transactions and currently account for over half of all customer payments.

Of course, many customers continue to prefer face-to-face contact with the company, and that level of service will be offered by customer service teams in 27 business offices that will remain open. Every Georgia Power region will continue to operate at least two business offices in their service areas. The offices that remain open are some of the busiest in the state with the majority handling more than 100,000 payment transactions per year.

Customer adjustment to this transition will be eased through the growth of the company's Authorized Payment Location (APL) network growing to more than 5,000 by year's end. Customers can continue to make in-person payments at APLs at the grocery and retail stores they likely visit on any given day across Georgia. Additionally, Georgia Power's community presence will continue to be strong, with area and local managers maintaining key roles throughout the state in community engagement, Georgia Power initiative awareness and economic development.



Cami Hopper (left) and Pam Jordan (right), customer service representatives, Clayton business office

Historical community presence

For generations, Georgia Power business offices have been operating in local communities. They have become local fixtures much like the post office, bank or favorite diner in town. Offices such as the Warrenton business office have been in continuous operation since 1927. The Metter business office began operation in May of 1927 and the Royston office in 1928.

With such a deeply rooted community presence, it's not surprising that customers and employees are consistently on a first-name basis – and it is to be expected that customers are expressing their appreciation as well as a fond farewell to the employees who served them so faithfully.

“When we started putting up signs announcing the closure, customers started coming by and asking about us,” said **Mary Hopkins**, a Metro North customer service supervisor and a Georgia Power employee of more than 43 years. “They enjoy seeing the employees every month and wanted to wish us well. We understand that more customers are making the move to paying online so the change makes sense. Our customers are always evolving.”

Fond memories and lifelong friendships

Customer service isn’t a job for everyone, but when it’s done well relationships can be developed that last a lifetime. Employees and customers have a long history of friendship over the years of business exchanged in these offices. One of the longest-tenured customer service representatives, **Brenda Murray** is retiring after 45 years of experience after the Brunswick office closes. “I just love helping people,” she said. “My life has been family and Georgia Power.” Brenda says that people recognize her when she’s out in public because of her longstanding service. People refer to her as “Miss Georgia Power,” when they see her. “I eat, sleep and breathe Georgia Power wherever I go,” she said.

Of the change in business practices, she expresses understanding. “When I started, we were doing everything on paper,” said Brenda. “But automation is everywhere. We could see the shift taking place. It’s a sign of the times.”

Customers all across the state have been showing up to express appreciation for all that business office employees have done. “Our customers have been wishing us well,” said **Pam Jordan**, a 38-year Georgia Power veteran and Clayton business office customer service representative. “For many who come to our office, it’s a social affair.”

Cami Hopper, 36-year employee of the Clayton business office, agrees. “We have watched these people grow up,” she said. “I love my job and my customers so this experience is bittersweet.”

Not only do employees bond with customers, employee friendships develop and thrive as well. Pam and Cami have been best friends for 25 years and were brought even closer together when Pam moved to the Clayton office seven years ago. “There are not many people who can say that they worked with their best friend,” said Pam. “We have not had a bad day working together.”

Final reactions and a look to the future

As the future unfolds following the shift in Georgia Power’s business model, employees anticipate opportunities to learn new lessons, grow their careers and develop more relationships.

Shay Batton, Customer Service Supervisor in the Columbus office, is the longest-tenured customer service employee to continue with the company following the closures. She has been with Georgia Power for 41 years. Although her office is the busiest in the state, she says that the walk-in customer traffic has declined, so she understands the changing business model. Her team will welcome five employees from surrounding local offices. “We are excited for these new faces to come be a part of our team,” she said. “My team is ready to work with them to get them acclimated to our office so we can move forward together.”

Hafiz Grier, a nine-year customer service veteran from the Metro West Region, is prepared for this next chapter. He will remain at the Smyrna office and welcome employees from other locations who will be working there. For himself and his coworkers, he’s excited about the change. “Employees are going to strengthen their skills because of this,” said Hafiz. “There is a lot of good energy and it will give us an opportunity to grow. Everything will be elevated.”

Hafiz was pleased with the way leadership communicated the changes to the organization. “The strategy was executed well by leadership,” he said. “The communication was transparent and employees had the opportunity to share their opinions and perspectives. It wasn’t a ‘top-down’ change.”

For Cami, Pam, Brenda and Mary, this time is all about the years of good memories and enjoying the outpouring of appreciation from their communities and from Georgia Power.

“The past few months have brought significant change for our company, especially for our customer service teams across the state,” said Craig Barrs, executive vice president of customer service and operations. “The outpouring of support and feedback we’ve received is reflective of the impact that our teams have had in these communities. While the ways we serve our customers may be different, our commitment to provide world-class value remains unchanged as we begin this new chapter in customer service.”