

CEFGA Summer Intern Finds 'Fantastic Opportunity' with Georgia Power

By Irene Wazgowska, CEFGA Feature Writer

Calen Cooper is "a breath of fresh air." With a hearty handshake and a smile that warms any heart, this southern boy is loved by all.

An 18-year-old graduate of Chattooga High School, he is now a full-time employee of Georgia Power. How'd he become an employee of this reputable company at such a young age? Smarts, the eagerness to learn, and a "fantastic opportunity."

Calen says he wanted to do everything in high school. He'd been in welding throughout the years and had planned on going to school for engineering. On the honor roll, it seemed as though he was bound for college. But an email his teacher Jeff Owens received from CEFGA about the organization's summer internship program changed his course forever.



Calen expressed interest in participating in the internship. And from there, the ball started rolling.

Every Saturday, for three weeks, Owens drove Calen the two hours to the Dekalb Workforce Development Center in Decatur. He wanted to "support" his student and "help ease his mind," during the whole process. Owens knew that it was a wonderful opportunity for Calen.

Over the course of time he spent at the DWD, Calen met Gordy Morris, Training Supervisor at Georgia Power's Klondike Training Center. Morris recalls one of his first

thoughts on Calen being: "for an individual whose teacher would bring him every Saturday to Decatur, he must be a special individual." He was also impressed when Calen stood-up as a volunteer without hesitation.

Morris identified Calen as a candidate for Georgia Power's summer internship program. Calen had passed the necessary tests, had been spoken highly of, and had gotten excellent reviews.



One of nine students selected, Calen and his small group of peers found themselves on their way to North Georgia Technical College. There, they began an eight-week Electrical Lineworker's Apprentice Certificate program. Of the nine that took the course, only seven were chosen to be brought on board as full-time employees of GA Power. One of which was Calen.

Most recently, Calen spent four weeks at Georgia Power's Klondike Training Center, where he participated in a Basic Line Equipment Skills class. The trainees learned about knots, wire sizes and how to safely and properly climb poles. Calen loved being high up. He liked working off the pole; for him it was "exciting and fun."

The class didn't keep him from his regular work duties. He was on-call every weekend for his Summerville UAL-1 (unsigned apprentice lineman) job.

Ricky Mundy is Calen's supervisor in Summerville. He says that Calen reminds him of himself. He started working for Georgia Power before he'd even graduated from high school. As an employee he says Calen is enthusiastic, outgoing and an eager and ready learner. "He wants to be right in the middle of everything... He'll do anything he's asked and then some."

For his part, Calen is happy to be outside and not cooped up. He likes doing groundwork for power lines, which means he sends materials up and helps support the linemen. He admits that being "the youngest and the littlest," means the crew messes with him. But he "messes with them right back... You've gotta have a pretty good sense of humor." And as Gordy points out, "working with Georgia Power is like working with family."

Calen says that his line of work is for those that are willing to put in the effort. "You need to be a go-getter." While he may have had a good start, he knows there's a lot more work to be done. In order to be a Lineman and make his way up through the company, there are at least another 4 years of education in front of him.

His mother, Lynn Bryant, says it's a "win-win situation." The summer internship was a stepping stone for her son. Now that Calen is an employee, he gets to learn while working. She hopes to see him advance through the company and knows that the goals Calen has set for himself will ensure this becomes a reality.

And while Calen may enjoy his hectic work life, he still has free time to do some relaxing. For him this means a little cave exploring & repelling, Bluegrass playing, and a bit of hunting.

He's not a big spender. In fact he's saving in order to be able to buy some land one day. Not a lot though. "Just enough to have a small farm."

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