

# An Esteemed Reputation Spans Four Decades

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On June 1<sup>st</sup>, after a 45-year career with one of the nation's largest gas distribution utilities, Lee Mullins retired. He boxed up his belongings, including a safety vest, photos of his volunteer adventures on Habitat for Humanity building projects, and his most prized possession, an old gas meter painted gun-metal gray and adorned with a lampshade. It was a retirement gift from his colleagues and perhaps the most fitting sendoff for an adept gas man who gave four decades of service to AGL Resources and its subsidiary, Atlanta Gas Light. The old meter now sits proudly in his den.

Nearly every company has one. That one person who earned their esteemed reputation through furrowed-brow endurance, whose boundless dedication is largely admired and who simply gave of themselves for more years than anyone could remember. Lee was all of those things and more.

As a right of way inspector, Lee was the one who ensured that Atlanta Gas Light's pipelines were safe. He took great pride in making sure that utility projects did not encroach on vital distribution infrastructure, and in a professional, yet personal way that many had come to appreciate, he made residents think twice before installing a fence near the company's facilities. In the busiest parts of Atlanta, Lee guarded high-pressure gas mains against damages. He could be heard warning contractors if they were erecting power poles that were too close for comfort, encouraging them to hand dig.

"His knowledge of the right of way is amazing," said Joel Anderson, a damage prevention specialist. "I called him the other day, told him where I was on the right of way, and he could describe every detail down to a tree in the yard. That's what I call real experience, not to mention a good memory."

Whatever the obstacle, Lee burrowed in. There was never any doubt that he would accomplish the task, endearing him to his peers, customers and the people he was charged to keep an eye on. He kept a vigilant eye over miles of transmission lines traversing the state, oftentimes making sure that logging trucks laid down enough cover before hauling their loads. He was respected as a straight shooter and known for sharing his skills and wisdom. In fact, new employees asked if they could be trained by him. "He raised the bar at AGL," added John Risher, of Ercon Innovative Erosion Control Systems.

But Lee did not spend his entire career on the right of way. He began working at Atlanta Gas Light in 1967 as a 19-year old. A buddy had told him that the gas company was hiring. When he



went down to fill out an application, little did he know it would be his only job. Lee started as a Class-C serviceman. Back then, he was dispatched to leaks by two-way radio and specialized in repairing natural gas equipment. He was known to counsel customers if their appliances needed repair often saying, "Pay me now or pay me later." On his rise up the ranks, he was promoted to pressure control foreman. "I recall times when we worked unbelievable hours trying to keep the pilots going, but Lee never complained," said James McKelvey, an operations manager who met Lee while in the Clayton County service center. "In those years, I was an inexperienced supervisor, and Lee gave a lot more to me than I was able to offer him. I really appreciated his patience as I tried to find my way."

Lee once led a crew that was tasked with creating emergency shutdown protocols at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. He spent months identifying control valves and verifying the gas feed. Just a few days after the project wrapped up, the protocols were put to the test when a contractor pierced a high pressure steel main several feet from the control tower. Lee and his coworkers quickly located the valve and within minutes, the flow of gas was completely under control. "That really saved the day," McKelvey said.

Speak with anyone who knew Lee and you sensed that they wanted more time with him before he called it a career. "I just felt it was time to move on," he explained one afternoon, "and that's what I decided to do. I've got great co-workers. That's probably what I'll miss most. But looking back at my career, I wouldn't change a thing," Lee said.

Lee will clearly be missed by all who knew him. There was no problem that Lee could not handle. I called him my fireman. People could be as mad as a hornet and I could always rely on Lee to put out the fire.