

Ethel “Grace” Pinkney – A Constant in Passport Production



Ethel “Grace” Pinkney inspects passport books as she prepares and fulfills requests from the State Department.

Ethel “Grace” Pinkney joined the GPO on July 2, 1974 in the Bindery. Among her duties were stapling GPO produced calendars and shrink wrapping jobs and cartons to be shipped out. She performed those duties for 60 days, then moved to collecting work and jackets.

“As a single mom raising young children, I remember how grateful I felt when I got this fantastic job at GPO with excellent pay and benefits that allowed me to provide for my family,” said Pinkney.

For the next 14 years she literally worked in almost every section of Plant Operations, until she was assigned to passport production in 1988.

Pinkney first applied for her clearance as part of the passports team in 1988. In the early 1990’s, when her clearance was approved, Pinkney regularly traveled to the State Department to deliver the blank passport books.

The State Department would submit a request to GPO for the number of

passports needed. GPO would prepare the shipment based on the request and load them into a GPO delivery section truck. Only cleared individuals could deliver the passport books to the State Department, so Pinkney would accompany the GPO driver for the deliveries. Once at the State Department, they would unload the passports, get a receipt confirming their delivery and return to GPO.

Then, in 1993 GPO began shipping passports directly to destinations at the direction, and on behalf of the State Department, so Pinkney’s regular delivery trips to the State Department stopped.

Pinkney is currently a Checker/Materials Handler in SID’s Passport Binding Division located in Building D. In this role she and her teammates coordinate and provide the main preparation work for shipping passports on behalf of the State Department.

“This is essentially how it works, we receive the work order through a request from the State Department. The

request provides information on destination, quantities and date of delivery. Our team provides the final analysis before anything is shipped. We carefully check the quantities, and our teammates re-check quantities to ensure accuracy. I cannot stress enough how important it is to make sure our counts are correct – that’s why our team checks and rechecks quantities. Once we have ensured the accuracy of the order, the order is processed and packed into boxes, labeled, packed onto skids, wrapped, and tagged for its destination and date of delivery,” said Pinkney.

In addition to her expertise in working on blanks, books, and pamphlets, in the bindery and in SID’s shipping section, Pinkney works on machines in support of passport production, when needed. She’s also responsible to determine what materials are needed for processing work, and as necessary she orders stock.

Throughout the duration of her career, Pinkney has worked on jobs for the Army, Navy, IRS, U.S. Postal Service, and the House and Senate, as well as countless others.

As a result of recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission the State Department announced changes to the travel document requirements in 2007. Pinkney clearly recalls how hectic things got. Since passports were now required for Americans traveling to Canada, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and Bermuda the demand was greatly increased and GPO stepped up to meet that demand. That year GPO produced about 23-24 million passports.

“We were extremely busy, adding a second and third shift, and many weekends just to make sure we were able to fulfill those additional orders for passports from the State Department,” says Pinkney.

Even in the busiest of times, Pinkney has made it



Pinkney makes final preparations to a shipment leaving GPO’s passport facility.



clear that her coworkers and supervisors are top notch.

She says, “Teamwork is the best! I absolutely love my team, you’re here for them and they’re there for you! We definitely keep each other motivated.”

She recognizes the importance of clear communication for the team. You let your teammates know what you need and they let you know what they need.

“Honestly, our crew is fantastic and runs like a well-oiled machine, no arguing or bickering because we all respect each other. We truly enjoy working together, even when you take time off, you look forward to returning to work with your team at the GPO,” says Pinkney.

“I have worked with

Grace as both a coworker PPW since 2003, and as her supervisor since 2014. Her knowledge and expertise was instrumental in my first few months as a supervisor. I still ask her opinion on certain topics and situations. Over the years, when Department of State tours our passport facilities, many people specifically ask to see “Ms. Grace,” including many director level individuals. She’s a hard worker and always maintains a positive attitude. Consequently, she is very well liked and respected by many at GPO, including SID managers and supervisors,” said Chris Evans, Supervisory Supply Management Specialist.

Just as we are all adjusting to working amid the COVID-19

pandemic, SID has made changes to the way they work under the Director’s **GPOSAFE** plan to ensure the safety of their teammates. First, they have split the workforce into two separate teams that work on alternate weeks. This includes supervisors that telework on the week their team is not working in the building. Everyone is wearing masks, there is hand sanitizer everywhere, a fogger machine provides periodic disinfection of the work area, and social distance is maintained. All of these changes may have slowed the work flow, but the health and safety of our team is a top priority.

“I’m keenly aware of how blessed I am to enjoy good health, especially at the age of 74,” says Pinkney.

Her advice to new employees, “Take your time and listen. Always be ready to work.”

“All of these years later, I continue to feel extremely grateful for the opportunities that GPO has afforded my family which now includes thirteen grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.”

Pinkney exclaims, “I cannot believe I’ve spent 46 years at GPO already, and I still look forward to coming to work every day!”

Editor’s Note:

This is part of a series of articles focused on employees with 40+ years of Federal service. We look forward to sharing their GPO experience with you.—Michelle R. Overstreet.