



Students play a major role in Georgia Power's *Will It Work* process at Southwire



Wednesday, March 9, 2016 – It is not often you can sit down with a group of high school kids and talk about the benefits of converting from traditional propane forklifts to electric forklifts on the manufacturing floor of the leading producer of wire and cable used in the distribution and transmission of electricity.

But these are not ordinary kids and it is what is happening at the Southwire Engineering Academy (SWEA) located at Southwire's headquarters in Carrollton. The 11th and 12th grade students from Carrollton High School recently took on a project with the help of Georgia Power to evaluate electric forklifts for use in production areas at the manufacturing facility.

SWEA, in its fifth year, is a competitive cooperative internship program that promotes achievement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The program allows students to apply engineering principles and critical thinking to solve modern manufacturing challenges.

Students, who are treated as engineers at Southwire, must apply for the coveted 26 spots in SWEA through their high school STEM program. Those chosen for the program spend their last two high school class periods at Southwire every other day.

Jill Oehler, industrial engineering manager at Southwire and one of the "coaches" for SWEA, said students study projects that are of value to Southwire. So when she saw a need for the company to explore the feasibility of electric forklifts, she reached out to Georgia Power and found Mark King, a senior sales executive who specializes in forklifts and conversions.



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"Propane has been the norm for our forklifts for many years," said Oehler. "With the costs associated with propane and the recent advances in electric lift and battery technology, I thought it would be beneficial for Southwire to take a look at converting. The project made perfect sense for our SWEA students."

King agreed and introduced the *Will It Work* process he developed for studying electric forklift technology to Oehler and the four-student team assigned to the forklift feasibility study.

"*Will It Work* is a data-based demonstration program comparing propane and electric forklifts in the customer's work application at their facility," said King. "It provides data on efficiencies, operational costs and environmental savings. Because it is a data-based program, the information is transparent and accurate so it proves if converting to electric will or won't work."

The SWEA team worked with Georgia Power to conduct a two-month study of the electric forklifts in service in different applications within the Southwire plant. Using several different brands of lifts, batteries, and chargers, they collected and analyzed data on fuel and maintenance cost savings, as well as environmental impacts. The students are currently presenting their findings, recommendations and cost justifications to Southwire executives and school officials.

Oehler and the students are putting together the capital equipment request for electric forklifts to be presented to senior management.

"The *Will It Work* conversion project could have an impact not only on the 40 lifts at this facility, but potentially on hundreds of lifts throughout Southwire's 17 facilities nationwide," said King. "While we are definitely pleased with the success of the *Will It Work* process, we are equally honored to have played a role in the students' STEM education program, which is so important for developing a well-prepared workforce for the future."

"The *Will It Work* process has been phenomenal for the students to understand the project," said Oehler. "I definitely see using it more in the future. Southern Company is one of our best customers, so it has been really great to work with Georgia Power on the common goal we share of preparing our students today for the needs of the future workforce."

In addition to the electric forklift project, all of the SWEA students recently toured Plant Wansley to learn all of the aspects that go into supplying electricity.