

Card Catalogs, Budgets and GPO's First Computer

The Journey of Ken Chambers



Financial Data Analyst Ken Chambers

Ken Chambers has been crunching numbers in GPO's finance office for decades, long before the first computers arrived at the GPO.

Chambers actually foreshadowed his journey to the GPO when he was just nine years old, on an outing with his family.

"I was sitting next to my twin brother Keith. As we rode past the big red brick building, I pointed and said, I'm going to work there one day," said Chambers. "I had no idea what the building was or what the GPO was, or even what the GPO did."

Chambers spent two years serving in the U.S. Navy. After his honorable discharge, Chambers and his older brother Tim, who had also completed his naval service, were seeking employment. Chambers had never heard of the Government Printing Office but agreed to check out the opportunity. Both he and his brother were interviewed and hired on the spot at the GPO.

Chambers has a vivid recollection of how different GPO looked on his first day in February 1973 than it does today.

"There were people everywhere ... about 8,500 employees at that time," said Chambers. "The buildings had a

more industrial feel with lots of books, paper and supplies stored in the 5th floor warehouse awaiting distribution."

Chambers began his career as a Clerk in the Superintendent of Documents, Cash Mail Section. He was responsible for creating, updating and maintaining the plastic cards that were used to determine whether books were in or out of stock. It was important to keep those cards up-to-date since the accuracy of phone orders directly depended on this information. Many plastic cards were kept organized in card catalog files that lined the walls and hallways throughout the entire section.

In 1975 Chambers seized the opportunity to work on one of GPO's first computers

According to Chambers, "Learning how to use a computer is one of the most exciting things I've ever done."

He said, "I'm grateful that my supervisor gave me permission to attempt something that I'd never done before, as I was very curious about how the new computer worked. I was hoping to learn a new skill and be able to show others how to use the new equipment."

Chambers read the entire manual and figured out how to use the new computer. With his newly acquired knowledge, Chambers trained 14 coworkers in his office on how to use the computer too.

"The other employees in my group knew that I was always trying to learn something new, and I was asked often by various members of our group what I was doing," said Chambers. "My answer was that I was trying to learn how we can use this new computer for the work we do." In 1980 Chambers began working in Finance as a Financial Analyst in Productivity and Work Measurement. He learned a lot about management skills and how to improve the productivity of employees.

Chambers produced productivity reports identifying employee issues affecting work performance. He was responsible for recommending changes and targeting areas of improvement to increase employee productivity.

"I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to work on another special project that allowed me to utilize my analytical and writing skills in preparing a report for management," said Chambers. "I would not have been successful in completing this project if I had not had supportive supervisors who recognized potential in me and provided opportunities for me to capitalize on my talent."

It was 1985 when Chambers began his position in the Office of Budget, where he continues to work on GPO's budget team today. In this capacity he's responsible for producing budget reports including the monthly headcount reports for GPO.

Chambers said, "Back in the 1980s, 1990s and into the 2000s, we were totally reliant on paper and produced various paper reports for the Productivity & Work Measurement Staff and the Office of Budget. We used typewriters and word processing machines to produce our reports. Using paper to generate reports agency-wide was very labor intensive and costly."

After learning about the budget process, Chambers' wheels started turning and he began to wonder how he

could get the budget into the computer and what he could do to make the process better.

In the early 1990s many of the budget reports were uploaded to the mainframe computer by Bill Guy, the Chief Budget Officer. Around this time, Chambers had the opportunity to start learning how to use the mainframe computer.

“This was very exciting and intriguing,” said Chambers.

Then in 1995, when GPO began using Windows 95, Bill Grennon trained Chambers how to do the budget upload. This experience was pivotal in Chambers’ future development working on GPO’s budget team.

Chambers directly credits his longtime supervisor Bill Guy “with opening the doors that unleashed my potential in finance. Bill has encouraged me and provided me with opportunities every step of the way,” said Chambers.

Chambers learned how to use Microsoft Excel under the direction of Bill Guy. This powerful software program is still used for the budget process today.

In the 1990s IT was looking to integrate new personal computers within the entire agency, so Chambers enthusiastically volunteered to serve as a “Network Administrator” on behalf of the Office of Budget. IT trained him, and with that knowledge he developed notes, manuals and reports that were used as he became a trainer for other employees.

“I have had the pleasure of working with Ken for over 30 years,” said Guy. “He was an early adopter of technology and enthusiastically led the way for other employees. He is extremely patient and always willing to help. He fully embraces the teamwork concept and helps motivate the team.”

Chambers served as the Network Administrator for the entire finance business unit. He trained all employees in finance on the new PCs. This project took almost two years, during which he upgraded the computers of 120 employees in finance, all while he continued his work on the budget.

Chambers said, “It’s amazing to me that much of the finance is almost paperless today. As a result of the automation we use today, GPO has substantially reduced the amount of



Supervisor Bill Guy, Ken Chambers, and Chief Financial Officer Bill Boesch

paper products used. Today, about 95 percent of my work is done electronically with only a small amount of paper used. We have successfully transitioned to the digital age.”

Currently, Chambers works in Financial Planning as a Financial Data Analyst. He reports directly to the Chief Financial Officer Bill Boesch

According to Boesch, “Ken is like the quarterback of the budget process at GPO. He keeps the budget team informed during every step of an extremely long budget process. He coordinates with the budget liaisons in each business unit. In addition, he uploads files, runs reports and provide monthly head count reports to senior management, and ultimately Congress.”

During his time at GPO, Chambers met and married his wife Sandra. She is the Executive Assistant to GPO’s Director. Chambers has been married to Sandra “the love of his life” for 28 years. They have three sons and five grandchildren. Their oldest son, Larry Reed, also works at GPO in Plant Operations.

Even Chambers’ dad had an interesting connection to the GPO. He was a mechanic at the Navy Yard after

World War II, and repaired cars, trucks, and fork lift trucks. One of his specialties was working on the Clark Fork trucks. GPO required his services from time to time to repair the Clark Fork trucks. GPO would either send a truck to the Navy Yard or his dad would be dispatched to GPO to work on the trucks.

“After many years of working at GPO, and after my dad retired from the Navy Yard, we were talking about GPO and he revealed to me this connection to the agency,” said Chambers.

For the foreseeable future Chambers intends to continue working — in fact he and the budget team have already begun work on GPO’s FY21 Budget.

“I enjoy my work. I have since I walked through the door in 1973. GPO is the best and only place I have ever worked!” said Chambers.

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