

OPEX® BALLOT OPENER AND EXTRACTOR ARRIVES JUST IN TIME FOR MUSCOGEE COUNTY

Manual letter openers and high school volunteers were just not enough.

OPEX®

// THE BACKGROUND

In 2020, after postponing their March primary several times, Muscogee County finally conducted their primary election in June. In previous elections, they would see approximately 8K-9K mail-in ballots, which was very manageable for their staff and high school volunteers. The June primary saw 28k mail-in ballots, which (because of the outer envelope and the privacy envelope inside) equated to 56k envelopes that required opening. Fortunately, Georgia implemented emergency rules that allowed counties to begin opening ballots two weeks prior to the election. With 30 workers, including 16 high school volunteers, they used manual letter openers and worked 18-hour days for fourteen days straight. They were completely overwhelmed. Then they had to repeat this arduous process in August for the special runoff in the Senate.

// THE CHALLENGE

By July, Muscogee County knew they could not continue to work this way, especially if there was another runoff. They reached out to OPEX after hearing a colleague from another county talk about their opener. By chance, they had also received an email from OPEX describing technology that could be used to help automate the process. Unfortunately, it took longer than they had hoped to secure funding, and they missed the opportunity to purchase the OPEX® Model 72™ in time for the November Election.

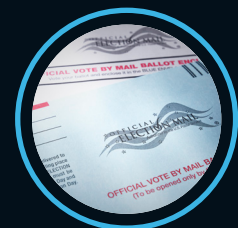
// KEY CHALLENGES



HIGHLY VISIBLE ELECTION WITH PRESSURE FOR BALLOTS TO BE COUNTED ON TIME



AMOUNT OF TIME TO COUNT BALLOTS



AN UNANTICIPATED SPECIAL RUNOFF ELECTION A MONTH AFTER THE GENERAL ELECTION

// KEY RESULTS

3

TIMES THE NUMBER OF BALLOTS THAT NEEDED TO BE OPENED THAN IN THE PAST

78%

REDUCTION IN TIME NEEDED TO OPEN AND EXTRACT BALLOTS

0

DAYS PAST ELECTION DAY THAT WERE NEEDED TO COUNT BALLOTS

// THE SOLUTION

The November 2020 Election put the spotlight back on Georgia. The outcome of their Senate race during the General Election meant another runoff election in January 2021, and perhaps a major change for the US Senate. With the world watching, Muscogee County knew that they needed to be meticulous and provide timely election results. Because of the date of the Election, the two-week reprieve they had enjoyed in the past was derailed by holidays, and their workers would be counting ballots for a fourth time in just over six months. They were exhausted.

Enter the Model 72 Ballot Opener and Extractor. Even with the holiday schedule, the team only needed to work seven 8-hour days instead of fourteen 18-hour days to ensure that all ballots were counted by 10:30 pm on Election Day.

// THE FUTURE

Now that Muscogee County knows how effective the ballot extractor is for elections, they realize its potential for other uses. For instance, in Georgia, they receive a large volume of applications for mail-in ballots, so they plan to use the Model 72 in the future to handle the opening of these application envelopes.

“WE DID NOT WANT TO BE THAT COUNTY THAT COULD NOT HAVE THEIR RETURNS IN ON ELECTION DAY.”

-Nancy Boren

Director of Elections at Muscogee County when reflecting on the Georgia Senate 2021 runoff

“NOW THAT OUR ELECTION SEASON IS OVER, I CAN SEE HOW OTHER COUNTY SERVICES COULD USE A MODEL 72 FOR OPENING ENVELOPES, BUT WE AREN'T SHARING. THEY WILL NEED TO BUY THEIR OWN.”

-Nancy Boren

Director of Elections at Muscogee County