

# THE NEXT GENERATION

As Patrick Epperson, Jr. was explaining Internet-based HVAC (heat, ventilation air conditioning) monitoring and control systems, Pat Epperson, Sr. listened attentively to his son. "I'm learning something here, too," he said, smiling.

"There is definitely a new generation of equipment, of communicating. It's the next wave," Patrick explained. "You can have Wi-Fi access to your air conditioning unit."

The value of that technology can be important for homeowners in the Lowcountry who are often away. "The humidity being what it is around here, if a system went down, especially in the

summer months, and the owner didn't know about it, there would be a house full of mold and mildew," Patrick said.

Pat Epperson, Sr. came to Hilton Head from Savannah in 1981 to begin his heating and air conditioning company. He sold it in 1998, but stayed on as general manager for several years.

But the entrepreneurial spirit was passed from father to son. Patrick, along with Martin Jones, whom Pat Epperson refers to as "our adopted son," began E.A.C. Heating and Air. Five years ago, father joined son at E.A.C.

Patrick grew up in the business. He started helping his dad at the age of 13. He was a helper in the field as a teenager. "I even started marketing under my dad's



**The Men of E.A.C.**  
(from left to right)  
Pat Epperson Sr.,  
Martin Jones and  
Patrick Epperson Jr.



Article by Paul deVere  
Photography by Anne

With technological innovations like programmable thermostats, zone controls and the capability of online monitoring, there is a conscious effort to put a homeowner more in charge of energy use and energy efficiency.

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wing," Patrick said. After graduating from Furman University, he was operations manager at the old company.

E.A.C. started with just two employees, Patrick and Martin. Both had worked at the old company but decided to make a go of it on their own. "We kind of looked at each other that first day and said, 'We'd better get busy,'" Martin said. They are now keeping close to 20 employees busy.

Martin elaborated more on new technology, explaining how homeowners can use their cell phones or PDAs to control their HVAC unit. "You can access it from your cell phone. Say you are arriving in town in a few hours. You can tell it what you want it to do," Martin said. The unit can also call the homeowner's cell if something is malfunctioning. "It's sort of saying, 'Come home,'" Martin laughed.

E.A.C. focuses on custom homes for both new installations and replacement systems, service contracts, and small, commercial jobs. Martin is charged with the new units. Patrick handles sales for existing systems that need to be replaced. Both new and replacement systems come with significant benefits to homeowners.

"Today's systems are much more energy efficient," Patrick said. He explained there is also a big improvement in indoor air quality. Plus, systems throughout a home communicate via computer rather than with wires, making installation simpler

and operation more exact. Then, there's the tax advantage. "For qualifying air-to-air heat pumps, the owner can get up to a \$1,500 tax credit," Patrick said. E.A.C. provides that information to homeowners.

Both of the Eppersons and Jones believe the Lowcountry provides a very good talent pool, and point to the Technical College of the Lowcountry as a perfect example. The company hired Veronica Brown, who was, at the time, the first female field technician to graduate from TCL.

One quality the senior Epperson instilled in his son—and Martin—was the quality of service and product the company must provide in order to grow. That was his "brand" at the old company, and it seems to have transferred well to E.A.C. While E.A.C. specializes in TRANE systems, the company will install any quality

### Air-Conditioning 9 things you need to know

- 1 Change your filter.
- 2 Fix air leaks.
- 3 Use a timer.
- 4 Insulate, insulate, insulate.
- 5 Keep the compressor and condenser free of obstructions.
- 6 Don't make it work so hard.
- 7 Get somebody on maintenance.
- 8 Don't close off rooms.
- 9 Consider an upgrade.

Source: www.thisoldhouse.com

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unit requested, either by a builder or homeowner. Service contracts are also available for other brands.

Patrick said that the lifespan of an HVAC unit depends on quality. "A good system and quality installation, the industry says the average is about 12 years. But we've seen them longer than that," he said. "We saw a customer last week, who was having problems with a unit installed [by another company] eight years ago. But his older unit we put it in 21 years ago was still running," Martin said.

With all the emphasis on energy efficiency in both new home construction and renovations, combined with the high standards of new equipment being introduced, the Eppersons and Jones are definitely part of the "green revolution." With such technological innovations like programmable thermostats, zone controls and the capability of online monitoring, there is a conscious effort to put a homeowner more in charge of energy use and energy efficiency.

In the almost three decades Pat Epperson, Sr. has been serving Lowcountry customers, from Beaufort to Hilton Head Island and all places in between (the same area E.A.C. covers), he said changes in the industry have been dramatic and exciting. After Patrick Epperson, Jr. finished his explanation of how homeowners can just jump up on the Web, wherever they are, and both monitor and control their HVAC systems, Pat Epperson, Sr. look at his son, and said, "Yup, the next generation is here."



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