

Air Conditioning Specialists

A small town farm boy from Watkinsville, Georgia, James Hayes joined the Navy after graduating from high school and found himself stationed in the large city of San Diego, California. Training James in the heating and air trade, the Navy would give him the foundation for a lifetime of successful business ownership.

After serving his country proudly, James and wife Lisa moved back to Georgia to be closer to family. The couple first lived in Athens while James worked for various heating and air companies. In 1967, an opportunity surfaced to start his own company in Covington; the couple, with a small loan from a family member in hand, took a leap of faith and started Air Conditioning Specialists, Inc. (ACS).

The couple purchased an old mill in Covington which served as the company office. The family lived behind the mill in a small mobile home. The early days were quite strained as Lisa, who was trained in accounting, kept the books and answered the phone while James did the manual labor.

As the company grew in size, so did the Hayes family. A daughter, Michelle, was born the same year the business opened. In 1970, a son, James Patrick (Pat), was born in May.

“Life was a struggle for my parents in the early days of the business,” observes daughter Michelle. “At times, my parents went without food so that my brother and I could eat. It was tough getting the business off the ground at first.”

Michelle and Pat grew up working in the company under the guidance of their parents. “Pat and I learned every aspect of the business through hard work including installation, accounting, and management of employees,” said Michelle.

Michelle credits her parents for not only teaching her the business but also how people-employees and customers alike-should be treated. “My mom and dad always treated people with respect and kindness. We consider everyone family and treat them as such,” added Michelle.

With an entrepreneurial spirit, James invented and patented a package air refrigeration unit called PAR in the 1980s. This piece of machinery was installed in convenience stores up and down the East Coast. He also built his own sheet metal shop on the grounds of the old mill.

Michelle met her husband, Mike Miller, when she attended Georgia College. Mike worked at the Covington ACS a few years to learn the trade but desired to move back home. So, in 1996, a second location was established in Milledgeville. Together, Michelle and Mike manage the Milledgeville office while Pat manages the Covington business. Both locations offer residential and commercial services.

Today, due to years of strong work ethic and excellence in customer service, the company has evolved into an enterprising leader in the Southeast. ACS performs jobs not only throughout Georgia but Tennessee and South Carolina as well. Contracts with high-rise apartment buildings

in Atlanta, the Mall at Stonecrest in Lithonia, and a large hotel on Savannah's Riverfront, cement ACS as a trustworthy and much sought after company for builders.

With the focus on family, Pat and Michelle's children-the third generation-are too learning the business from the ground up. Although James passed away a few years ago, Michelle knows he is looking down on the company with approval. She reflects on his philosophy which keeps his memory alive. "Dad always taught to treat people well then good will come to you. We strive to live by his motto every single day."