

## When Hard Times Struck Ms. Harris, HEAT Was There to Help

Getting to the place of creating a comfortable life is not easy for many of us, but we gain a great sense of security and optimism as our time and efforts increasingly pay off. Ms. Harris is someone who would say earning a valuable education and working hard afforded her a good, normal life. A career in information technology not only helped her provide well for herself but also for her son, leading him to be a straight-A student.

However, Ms. Harris' circumstances were flipped upside down when a driver rear-ended her new car after looking down to eat some food. The unexpected collision injured her back but thankfully did not cause any broken bones or prevent her from moving on her own. Sadly, the damage to her car resulted in it being totaled. Ms. Harris had not even owned the car for a year.

She managed to get a rental car and go about her usual activities with adjustments as needed to not exacerbate her injuries. During a doctor's appointment, she was informed that her back disks were particularly the area of her pain. After leaving her appointment, misfortune struck again. A young man who was racing his car ran into Ms. Harris' vehicle, severely injuring her right hip, leg and foot. Both accidents were about two weeks apart.

This second round of car calamities landed Ms. Harris in the ICU for 33 days and left her unable to walk for six months. Two therapists were needed to help reteach her how to walk and perform common hygiene tasks. The bills for her extensive medical care amounted to thousands of dollars. Though her mobility improved before she was discharged, she is still deemed totally disabled.

Ms. Harris never thought she would be in this situation after years of building a successful life. Her family helped when they could, and she reached out to agencies that gave assistance for her mortgage, electric bill and food stamps. After receiving a disconnect notice for her gas service, Ms. Harris once again had to make a way out of what seemed like no way. Timely aid came again when she learned she was eligible for HEAT funds after receiving contact information from her gas provider. She was guided through an efficient energy assistance process that gave her one less burden to worry about.



Ms. Harris is maintaining her living expenses the best she can with help from disability benefits. With such a limited income, she worries about how she can manage to celebrate her son, who has been accepted by some of the country's top universities, for his upcoming high school graduation. But she still tries to focus on counting the blessings she has experienced during this difficult period. To HEAT's donors she says, "You can't predict the world. It can be anybody [who ends up in need]. It's an honor to have people out there who care about others. You'll receive more than what you give." 🔥

### Consistency Is Key Thank You for Your Support!

With a decades-long history providing statewide energy assistance, HEAT understands the importance of consistency. One of the impactful factors that has remained consistent in our journey is the support of donors like you. Our staff and board of directors are always grateful for each donor who makes it possible for us to serve more than 115,000 vulnerable families. On behalf of all the HEAT fund recipients, thank you to our corporate supporters, energy providers, community organizations and the numerous individuals who give online as well as through the mail, monthly energy bills and employee-contribution programs. 🔥

# Municipal Partner Appreciation: CITY OF WINDER



Located in Barrow County, the city of Winder has been a faithful HEAT partner for 18 years. Winder is unique among our generous municipal partners because it is the only city that allows utility customers to give to HEAT by rounding up their bill to the nearest dollar, with the extra change being donated to our mission. We have Mike Jewell, who is our board vice chairman and the former gas director for Winder, to thank for spearheading the program's implementation.

Mike established his gas career in Tennessee and continued in Georgia, working for the city of Winder for more than 10 years. His interest in HEAT grew while at a doctor's appointment when he noticed a woman crying. Upon asking her about her dilemma, Mike learned she was unable to pay for both her insulin and gas bill before the disconnection date. He consoled her by sharing that the city could provide assistance (though not revealing his position with Winder) and made a call to speak with someone who informed him about HEAT. Due to the situation's urgency, Mike decided to personally help the woman so she would not lose gas service. He later got in contact with HEAT's then executive director, Janet Joseph, after looking into the organization further.

As a result, Mike worked with city staff

to raise money for HEAT through a tent display at a local festival, which the city continued for a few years. Attendees could stop by the tent to donate and have their name entered into a raffle to win a prize. After the first festival, Mike moved forward with his idea to start the round up program. Though there were a lot of questions from Winder's billing department about how implementation would work, the timing was advantageous because the city was looking into updating its billing system. His persistence prevailed with the city council and mayor approving the round up program in 2004. The customer service staff was also instrumental in the process by encouraging customers to sign up when they paid their bill in person. Overall, getting the program started took about five to six months.

Mike believes the Winder round up program is a worthy endeavor not only because it is a simple way to give back to less fortunate neighbors but also because the donations are funds that come back to the city when utility customers receive assistance to keep their gas account active.

Mike attributes his values for helping people to his father who often did random acts of kindness for others and would tell him, "There are two things: you can't turn your back on a

friend or neighbor in need and you can't out give God." When asked why he believes HEAT's mission to provide energy assistance is important, Mike said, "It's vital any time we can help neighbors regardless of the situation. Being in the gas field, it's easy to see the need."

Winder's Utilities Operations Director Tabatha Knight, who has worked in the gas department for 17 years, shares Mike's sentiments about HEAT and added, "It could be an elderly person on a fixed income, a single parent who is having financial difficulties or anyone who is struggling and needs assistance with their heating bill."

Winder has raised nearly \$64,000 in customer donations since implementing the round up program. Any of the city's utility customers – whether gas, water, sewer or garbage – can donate through the program. Customers can also make donations in addition to rounding up their bill or they can donate a designated amount without participating in the round up program.

Collectively, Winder residents truly exemplify the meaning of "a little bit

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**Donate to HEAT. Many individuals need your help today.**

Donate online at [heatga.org](http://heatga.org) or complete this form and mail it with your check to the address below.

*A donation of \$350 helps one deserving family pay their utility bill. However, donations of any amount are needed and appreciated.*

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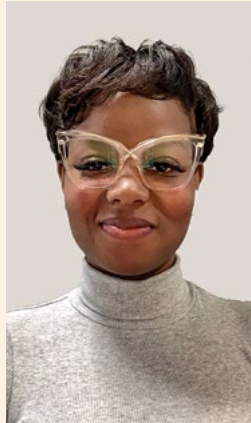
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# Welcome to Our New Team Member

## Melyssa Hill-Austin

*HEAT Communications/  
Administrative Specialist*



There is a saying that goes, "Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success." HEAT has been immensely fortunate to have individuals come on board to help expand the reach of our mission to serve less fortunate Georgians. We are happy to welcome Melyssa Hill-Austin as a new addition to our team.

Melyssa was born and raised in Marietta, Georgia. The strong foundation she received from her nuclear family is the primary influence of her intuitive and passionate nature. She attended Kennesaw State University and obtained her sociology degree. While in college, Melyssa coordinated several volunteer events such as free HIV testing, toy drives and cookie fundraisers to donate to local organizations. She had the opportunity to study abroad in China for two months, which sparked a love for traveling the world.

Melyssa found her calling in social work by serving medically fragile children and struggling adolescents in foster care. She dedicated her career to social work for seven years, and then eventually decided to transition into the nonprofit sector. After the 2020 coronavirus lockdown, she began to put some things into perspective. Through starting a family, she learned the importance of working to live rather than living to work. Adjusting her perspective about what truly matters most to her led Melyssa to seek another career path that better suited her new outlook.

In joining HEAT, Melyssa feels a good connection with its mission to prevent human suffering by providing energy assistance for Georgians in need and is optimistic about its cohesive and safe work environment. Driven by her compassion for others, she takes pride in providing the best experience possible for people turning to HEAT for help and is motivated to serve wherever there is a need. Encountering roadblocks does not create impenetrable barriers for Melyssa but instead allows her to flourish by exemplifying her ability to solve problems regardless of the obstacles. She believes HEAT is a welcoming bright light for people who are experiencing hardships during these challenging economic times. 🔥



## Setting Your Thermostat for Spring

Spring has returned, which means temperatures are on the rise. To help you save money and energy, let's look at some tips for setting your thermostat this season.

### What is the best thermostat setting for spring?

The ideal temperatures for indoors depends on a few factors, including age, sex, and health. Experts generally agree the perfect range for humans is somewhere between 65 degrees and 72 degrees, with research showing most people share this preference. However, this range does not particularly take energy savings into consideration.

In milder climates like Georgia, the best thermostat setting for spring is 78 degrees when you want to cut costs while still staying relatively comfortable. If that temperature is a

little too warm for you but you still want to save, you can try adjusting your thermostat at different times to offset higher-use periods throughout the day.

### Is turning off the air conditioner periodically a good idea?

The idea that your cooling system will work harder when you turn it off and then back on later in the day is not truly accurate. You can turn off your air conditioner completely when no one is home for eight hours or more. The system will run at the same speed no matter when you turn it on, though it may run longer to cool a house that was significantly rising in temperature due to the hot sun. However, that will not cancel out the cost savings you gain when your A/C is off. As a precaution, consider to what extent you can allow your home to rise in temperature and humidity if you have pets or delicate items.

### What should I know about manual and programmable thermostats?

For a thermostat adjusted by hand, try bumping the temperature to 78 degrees or warmer before you leave

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***Helping low-income  
Georgians meet their energy needs***

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goes a long way" through their consistent contributions to help fellow Georgians who are struggling. Tabatha will readily tell you the city is a wonderful community with many opportunities for families and businesses, including monthly downtown events that bring neighbors together and beautiful nature sites throughout the area. A big thank you to the city of Winder for its long-standing commitment to give back to people most in need! 🔥

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in the morning. You can save up to 10% on your cooling expenses for every 7 to 10 degrees warmer you make your home per eight-hour periods each day.

If you no longer want the hassle of remembering to manually adjust your temperature, consider buying a programmable thermostat that adjusts automatically based on the settings you use. Many models are available and most are easy to install yourself.

*This is an edited blog post share from Gas South.*

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HEAT, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) statewide nonprofit organization that raises funds to help Georgians who need temporary financial assistance with energy bills. Thousands of households need help, but only limited funding is available.

***Our mission is to provide energy assistance for Georgians in need.***



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