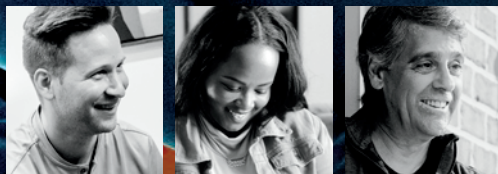


# THE EFFICIENT HOME

EVERY NEIGHBOR  
HAS A

*Story*

Get inspired by how they  
save and spend energy



*Simplify your life—  
one habit at a time*

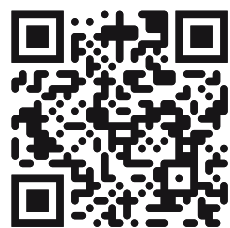
SMART LIFESTYLE, CURATED FOR YOU BY BGE AND EMPOWER MARYLAND





It's easy to fall in love with a certified energy-efficient new home. High-performance doors and windows. High-efficiency heating and cooling equipment. Next-level insulation. Put it together and you'll **save up to 20%** on energy compared to standard new homes built to code.

**There's so much to love, it's almost like your home's a part of the family.**



Learn about BGE's Residential New Homes Program at [BGESmartEnergy.com/NewHomes4](https://BGESmartEnergy.com/NewHomes4) or scan the QR code.

EmPOWER Maryland programs are funded by a charge on your energy bill. EmPOWER programs can help you reduce your energy consumption and save you money. To learn more about EmPOWER and how you can participate, go to [BGESmartEnergy.com](https://BGESmartEnergy.com).





FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

# NAVIGATING CHANGES

*How tiny changes can make a big difference*

This is Baltimore. We've weathered challenge after challenge—from the Great Fire to the Key Bridge collapse to the everyday stress of making a budget stretch just a little further. Through it all, what's stayed constant is how we show up for each other.

That's why our cover story features real people finding ways to save. Neighbors finding small, meaningful ways to make their homes more comfortable—without adding more pressure to their lives.

You'll meet Adam, a newly engaged professional who scheduled a Quick Home Energy Check-up at no additional cost to help prep for the next chapter. Jenny, a fitness instructor and mom, prioritized her air quality and health with an HVAC Tune-up. Michael, a lifelong builder and artist, used a home energy audit to guide thoughtful upgrades in his space.

And Denver, a caregiver juggling multiple generations, found small tech fixes—like a smart thermostat—that made a big difference.

These stories are proof: When life feels stretched, small steps can still create meaningful impact. With a mix of real-life choices and expert advice, this issue offers approachable ways to simplify your routines, use energy more thoughtfully and bring a little more peace of mind to your home.

Because in moments like these, thoughtful choices—especially around how we manage our energy—can bring more comfort, ease and relief to everyday life.

— BGE ENERGY EFFICIENCY TEAM

**“  
These stories are  
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feels stretched, small  
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# AN EASY RECIPE FOR EVERY *Season*



You have errands to run and dogs to walk. You have batteries to buy and split ends to unsplit. Because of those and an ever-growing list of things to do, what you don't have is time. Or at least time to waste making four-course meals involving a tasting menu of appetizers and made-from-scratch desserts. So, let's tackle ways you can save time on the things you do every day.

## That's where these recipes come in

Somewhere between smoking a brisket and serving cold cuts, these recipes deliver maximum sumptuousness with minimum time, energy and effort. To truly meet your I-don't-have-time-for-that needs, we'll do a hard pass on a conventional oven. They consume a lot of energy and take a lot of time. We'll also take a hard pass on slow cookers. While they consume very little energy, they take a lot of time (the word "slow" is actually in the name). So, we'll stick to options that are both time and energy efficient. We'll also give a nod to each season for a total of four recipes. Enjoy.



## Toaster Oven Tortilla Pizza

-for spring

Light and savory, this recipe is perfect for when the air gets warmer and green shoots appear on lawns. You'll be amazed at how easy it is to make a pizza with really simple ingredients. Now, you can make your homemade pizza sauce. It's just tomato paste, water and spices. But if the whole point is to save time and energy—in this case, your energy—just get some from a jar. And you just might be able to recruit others for the making of the pizza part. It's easier on you and fun for your fellow pizza creator(s). Most importantly, when people make their pizzas, they tend to eat (and love) their pizzas.

### Instructions

**Step 1.** Preheat the toaster oven to 400°F and line the tray with tin foil. Then, lay a tortilla on the tin foil.

**Step 2.** Mix tomato paste, 1 tbsp water, salt, oregano, basil, garlic and crushed red pepper flakes in a small bowl to make a quick pizza sauce. If you have a jarred pizza sauce on hand, you can use 2.5 tablespoons of that instead.

**Step 3.** Next, spread pizza sauce over the tortilla. Then, sprinkle mozzarella cheese over the sauce. Finally, top with pepperoni or toppings of your choice.

**Step 4.** Bake for seven minutes. Slice into four pieces and enjoy.



### Ingredients



1 tortilla



1/2 tablespoon  
tomato paste



1/2 cup  
mozzarella cheese



1/4 teaspoon  
red pepper flakes



1/2 teaspoon  
dried oregano & basil



1/4 teaspoon  
salt



1 clove garlic,  
minced



1 ounce  
pepperoni (optional)



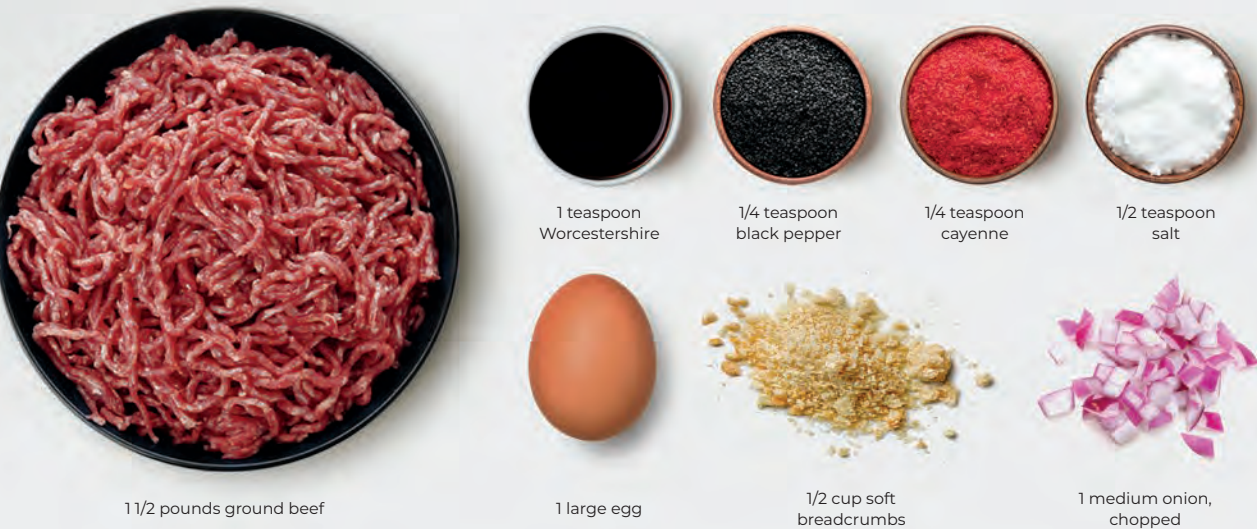
# Hamburgers From the Grill

-for summer

Firing up the grill for summer does a lot of good. It keeps you from heating up your kitchen and allows you to wear silly “Kiss the Cook” aprons and poofy chef’s hats. Perfect for a quick lunch or dinner, you can whip up these burgers in minutes. Not only will you save time doing dishes (since this is a knife-and-fork-free meal), you can also make the neighbors jealous as you fill the neighborhood with delicious smells.



## Ingredients



## Instructions

- Step 1.** Preheat the grill to 350°F–400°F.

**Step 2.** Add all ingredients (ground beef, soft breadcrumbs, large egg, onion, Worcestershire sauce, black pepper, cayenne and salt) into a large mixing bowl and mix by hand.
- Step 3.** Divide mixture into six 1/3-pound patties.

**Step 4.** Grill patties for three minutes per side.

**Step 5.** Add toppings and serve warm.

# Buffalo Chicken Wings

-for fall

Fall often means football. Football definitely means wings. When the air turns crisp, bundle up on the inside with these eye-watering hot, hot wings. Great things about wings: They’re crispy, they’re delicious and they require no utensils to enjoy. That last one is big if you have kids in your family. So, embrace your carnivore messiness and dig into these crowd pleasers.



## Ingredients



## Instructions

- Step 1.** Pat the chicken wings dry and sprinkle generously with salt. Place the wings in the air fryer basket so they are not touching.

**Step 2.** Set the air fryer to 360°F and cook for 12 minutes, then flip the wings with tongs and cook for 12 minutes more.
- Step 3.** Melt the butter in a microwave-safe bowl for one minute. Whisk in the hot sauce.

**Step 4.** Toss the wings with the sauce in a large bowl. Serve with dressing on the side.



## Sun-Dried Tomato and Herb Baked Eggs

-for winter

Perfect for winter, a time when cold mornings are made better with a hot breakfast. And perfect for breakfast, a time when you rarely have a lot of time, these delicious eggs will upgrade your cooking game. Serving a crowd? Fear not. You can easily scale the quantities up or down to match the size of your group. You'll just need one ramekin per person. No ramekins? Get some. They're perfect for making fast and easy dishes. And you'll save time doing dishes since you bake and eat in the same little cup. Don't have a slew of ramekins on hand? You can substitute a muffin pan and serve on plates.

### Instructions

**Step 1.** Preheat toaster oven to 350°F.

**Step 2.** Coat the inside of one ramekin or oven-safe dish with olive oil.

**Step 3.** Line the bottom of the dish with sun-dried tomatoes and break two eggs on top. Sprinkle with fresh herbs.

**Step 4.** Bake uncovered for 15–20 minutes until egg whites are firm.

**Step 5.** Serve immediately.



### Ingredients



1 tablespoon  
sun-dried tomatoes



1/2 teaspoon  
fresh basil



2 eggs



Kosher salt  
to taste



1/2 teaspoon  
fresh parsley



1 teaspoon  
olive oil

## Design. Bake. Manage. Hire.

Find the right recipe  
for saving energy.

When you run a small business, every cent counts. BGE is here to help you save energy, starting with an energy analysis, available at no additional cost to you. Reducing energy use? That's one thing off your plate.



To schedule your energy analysis, visit [BGESmartEnergy.com/SmallBusiness4](https://BGESmartEnergy.com/SmallBusiness4) or scan the QR code.

EmPOWER Maryland programs are funded by a charge on your energy bill. EmPOWER programs can help you reduce your energy consumption and save you money. To learn more about EmPOWER and how you can participate, go to [BGESmartEnergy.com](https://BGESmartEnergy.com)

**Shannon C., Owner**  
Starry Night Bakery  
Westminster

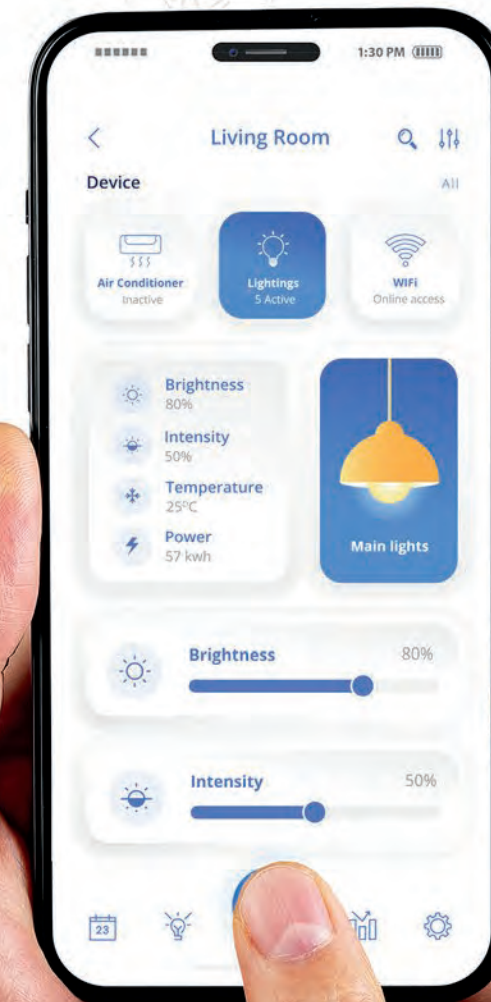


# Smart Tools That Get You —and Get Things Done

**Life's busy. These smart tools can help you reclaim time, cut energy waste and streamline your life.**

**This is really about your baseboards.** You want to clean your baseboards. Seems logical. But going after that deep clean means you lose out on more urgent tasks. You have to buy gifts and do laundry and cook dinner and pay bills. And all the while your dusty baseboards are just sitting there in their own dirt, silently judging you. All while figuring out what's for dinner or remembering to dim the lights, it can feel like one more tab open in your brain.

That's why we looked for tools that do more than save time. These smart helpers fit into your routines, take some mental load off and help you use your home's energy a little smarter. Because building a more energy-efficient home doesn't mean overhauling your life—it starts with simple choices that actually fit your life.



## One device. Many jobs.

### Smart Hubs

This isn't about doing more—it's about setting things up once and letting your home take it from there. A smart home hub app lets you link and control your lights, thermostat, coffee maker, plugs and more—all from one place.

Picture this: You head out, and your home knows what to do. Lights turn off. Thermostat adjusts. Doors lock. Then when you return, everything's back the way you like it. You don't need to be a tech expert or have every smart gadget either. These hubs work even if you just want to automate the lights or your coffee routine. Whether you're relaxing in Mount Vernon or managing after-school chaos in Towson, these tools give you quiet backup—and smarter energy use without the fuss.

**Pro tip: You can get rebates on smart thermostats on BGE's website.**





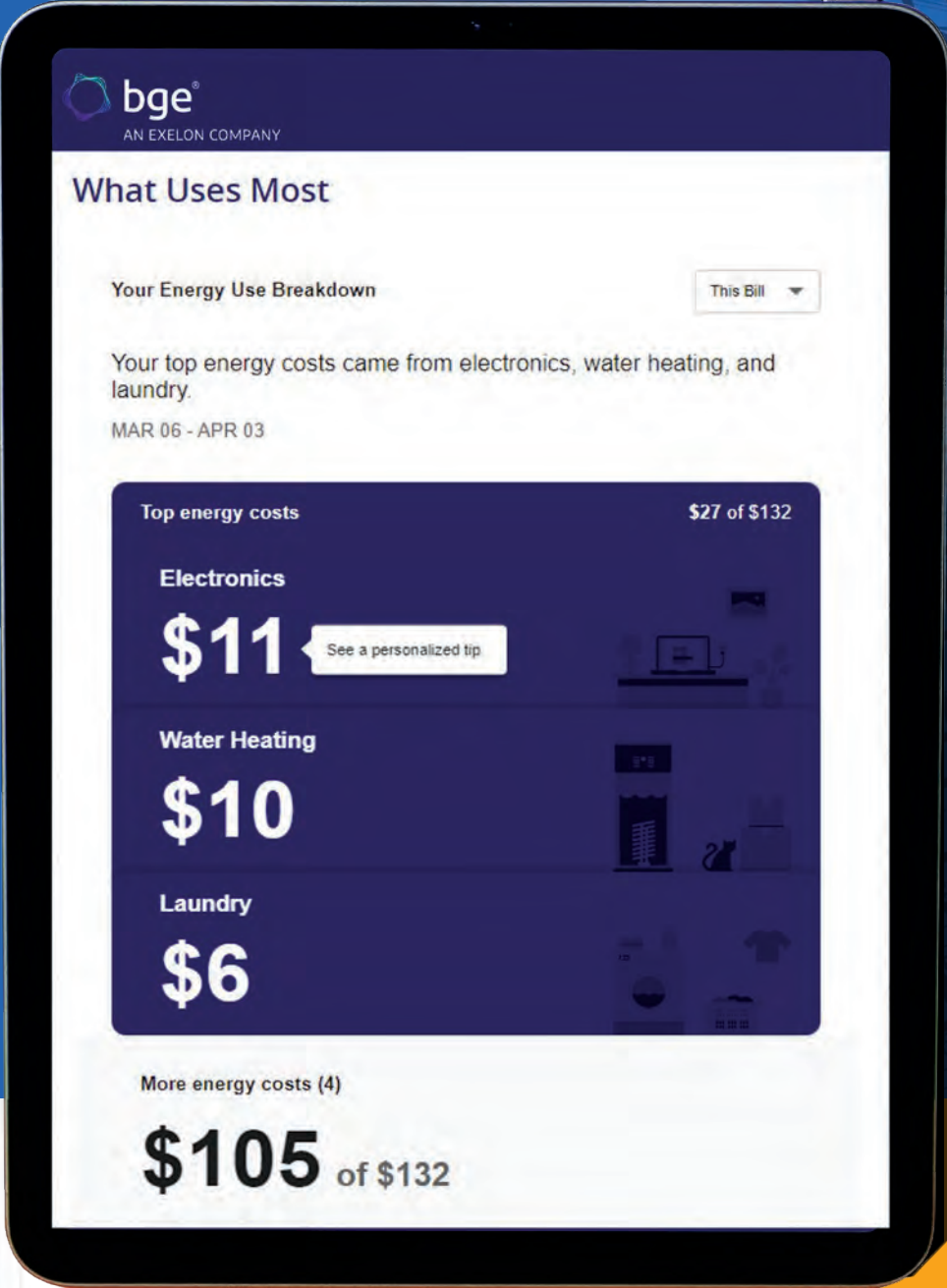
# Your Home, in Your Pocket

## BGE's My Account Tool

Home life takes energy—literally. While you can't plan for everything, BGE's My Account tool helps you stay ahead of the curve. You can:

- Set up AutoPay or Budget Billing.
- Track your energy use as it happens.
- Get alerts when your usage suddenly spikes.
- Compare your energy habits month to month.
- Complete your What Uses Most Profile to discover which appliances are driving your energy use.

It's not about crunching numbers—it's about being in tune with how your home uses energy. A few small shifts, and you're saving money without even trying—making energy efficiency simple and affordable for everyone.



# Thinking About an EV?

## Try SWITCH + BGE's EVsmart® Network

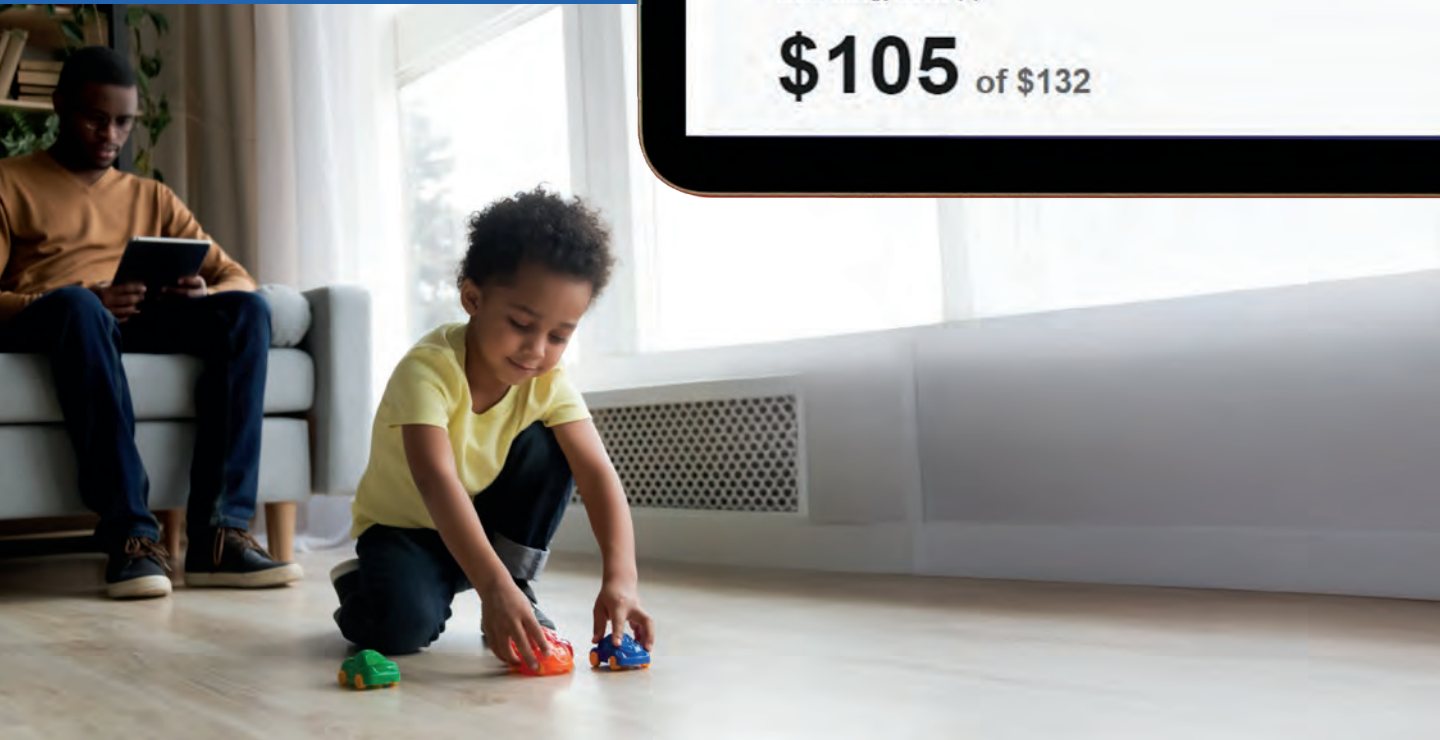
Curious about going electric? The SWITCH app makes charging simple—find stations, reserve a spot, track your charge and pay right from your phone.

It's great for city living and works with BGE's EVsmart network, which is adding chargers all over Maryland in places you already go.

Explore EVsmart: [bge.com/EVsmart](https://bge.com/EVsmart)  
Download SWITCH: [swtchenergy.com](https://swtchenergy.com)

Less stress. More charge. Smarter drive.

Baltimore's EV scene is growing, and apps like SWITCH are helping it feel more like a lifestyle—and less like a puzzle.





## A Shameless Plug for a Plug Smart Plug

Hmmmm. What in your home is on some mysterious energy binge. Is it the lamp? The TV? Your dog having “The Zoomies”? Let’s find out.

We’d like to introduce you to the smart plug. Here’s how it works simply:

- **Plug the smart plug into your outlet.**
- **Plug the desired appliance into the smart plug.**
- **Monitor the energy use of that appliance.**
- **Control your appliance via a smartphone app.**

Perfect for the energy detective or the energy detective to be, this advanced smart plug does more than control an outlet—and the device plugged into said outlet. It automates. It does more than monitor your energy use for that device. It optimizes. It doesn’t just work with the info you’ll get from My Account. It complements it.

Simply plug it in, download the app and, boom. You have pinpoint energy consumption info for your device—along with automated energy management.

### Real Tools. Real Relief.

None of this is about becoming someone you’re not. These tools just help make life run a little smoother.

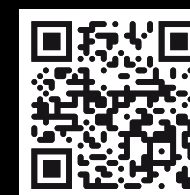
And when those tools help you save time, money and energy—while supporting Maryland’s energy efficiency goals? You win. Maryland wins. Your freshly cleaned baseboards win.



## Get rewarded for taking it easy

Sign up for **Connected Rewards<sup>SM</sup>**  
and earn bill credits for using  
less energy

When energy demand is high, we’ll briefly and automatically adjust your thermostat by no more than 4 degrees. You reduce your energy use. You earn bill credits. You do everything without lifting a finger.



Enroll now at  
**BGESmartEnergy.com/ConnectedRewards4**  
or scan the QR code.

EmPOWER Maryland programs are funded by a charge on your energy bill. EmPOWER programs can help you reduce your energy consumption and save you money. To learn more about EmPOWER and how you can participate, go to **BGESmartEnergy.com**.





# Pro Secrets Revealed

***We toured a pro-built neighborhood to learn what's really working—and how you can bring those energy-efficient smart home ideas into your own space.***

We all have someone to look up to. If you're a football fan, maybe it's your favorite Ravens player, whose jersey you wear while extolling the virtues of their rushing game to anyone who will listen. Maybe you've got a foodie friend who always finds the best eats in Federal Hill. Well, when it comes to our homes, who better to emulate than a "star" of high-performance tech? No hard hat required.

So, let's take a look at what the pros are doing to see if we can pick up on an approach or two.

Interior of a home in The Cove at Sparrows Point

## Signed. Air Sealed. Delivered.

Here's a not-so-fun fact: Most homes leak air like a pasta strainer. From gaps around outlets to leaky ducts and doorframes, warm (or cool) air slips away without us noticing.

The Beazer team tackles that with a whole-home sealing system. They pressurize the house with a sealant that finds and plugs every little hole.

If that sounds futuristic, it is. But it's also incredibly effective. According to the EPA, smart air sealing can cut your home's energy loss by 10%—no foam insulation suit required.



## The Pro's Pro

You don't become a 10-time winner of the ENERGY STAR® Partner of the Year Award without knowing a thing or two about the craft of building energy-smart homes. And Beazer Homes knows more than a thing or two. They've been building homes for over nine generations, since English builder George Beazer founded the company back in the 1600s, when locally sourced stones and thatched roofs were all the rage. They're making a big push to bring more

energy-efficient residences to Maryland, having launched Hampton Hills, our state's first-ever series of NextGen certified homes.

Beazer builds over 300 homes a year in Maryland alone. So we visited their new Baltimore townhome community, The Cove at Sparrows Point Country Club team gave us a firsthand look at the innovative technologies they're installing in these townhomes—and how you might do the same.



## Smooth Sailing with Variable-Speed Heat Pumps

Say you're driving from Parkville to Columbia. You can punch the gas and pray, or ease into the ride and still make it—just without giving your car (or your nerves) a workout.

That's the concept behind variable-speed heat pumps. Instead of cycling full blast on and off, they gradually adjust to reach your preferred temperature. Less noise. Less wear. More balance.

The motor automatically adjusts its speed based on your demand. Only when temps change dramatically does it work harder. This reduces energy consumption and gives you more precise control of the temperature in your home. That means less energy use for the same comfort. And variable-speed motors help reduce your home's humidity, for even more comfort.

Bonus? According to ENERGY STAR, heat pumps can deliver up to four times the energy they consume. Which, around here, counts for something.

## Induction: A Kitchen Revolution

Let's talk stoves. Most of them heat up everything—the pan, the air, the kitchen, your patience. But induction cooktops skip the drama. They send heat directly to your pot (as long as it's magnetic) and nowhere else.

These cooktops are precise, are fast and don't overheat your space.

## The Lowdown on Low-E Windows

Ever feel like your windows are just for looks? That might be because they're letting heat in during summer and out during winter.

Low-e windows fix that. The "e" stands for "emissivity," but what you really need to know is this: They help your home stay comfortable by reflecting the kind of heat you don't want—while letting the light in.

Plus, they protect your sofa and curtains from fading in Baltimore's sunny seasons. And let's be honest—replacing faded furniture is way more expensive than switching out a windowpane.



## Ready for Zero (Energy)

What's cooler than a house that saves energy? One that's ready to make its own.

Zero Energy Ready Homes are built so efficiently that a renewable system—like solar—could power most or all of their yearly needs.

Wiring is run through the attic for solar hook up and a gang box is installed for safety and wall-mounted battery is installed.

Translation: These homes are built for today, but prepped for tomorrow.

If that sounds a little out of reach, know this—there are plenty of small steps homeowners can take to move toward a more efficient setup, one project at a time.

## The Bottom Line

You don't need a brand-new house to start living smarter. Swapping in a heat pump, sealing some leaks or upgrading to induction can all help your home save energy—with less effort on your end.

Even something as small as a \$10 caulking gun can make a dent. (And, yes, it's more satisfying to use than you'd think.)

So whether you're a DIY weekend warrior or just looking to do more with what you have, there are real options out there that make a difference. You don't have to go all-in—just start where you are.

And if you ever need inspiration? Just look to the pros. They've got a head start—but they're happy to share the blueprints.



### Considering building a new home?

Visit [bgesmartenergy.com/residential/help-me-save/new-homes](https://www.bgesmartenergy.com/residential/help-me-save/new-homes) to find ways to save.



YOUR ENERGY. YOUR MONEY.

# SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE ONE HABIT AT A TIME

According to a study by the Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships, habits account for nearly 45% of our behaviors on any given day. So, in the spirit of making things better, let's jump in and cover several habits that will help you, your hectic schedule and your bank account.

## TIME-SAVING HABITS

### Create a cleaning schedule

To prevent your cleaning tasks from feeling overwhelming, take one thing at a time. The best way to keep your cleaning from getting out of control is to create a cleaning schedule. When you assign a specific task to a specific day, things won't build up. This way, you'll jump on a quick job—like cleaning the bathrooms—and you stay on schedule. This approach also prevents that feeling of dread on a Saturday morning when your entire place is a wreck and you cower under the covers in fear of spending an entire day cleaning.

### Automate household tasks

Consider using automated devices like a smart doorbell, robotic vacuums and a smart thermostat to lighten your load. That's what technology should do, streamline your life.



## Batch cooking and meal prepping

There is one big benefit of meal prep—or preparing your meals for the week in one setting. You save time. That extra time can be used throughout the week for other things instead of planning and cooking meals repeatedly. You can even use the recipes in this issue, like air-fryer dishes, to make things easier. And don't forget the slow cookers that save you time in the long run and the air fryers that save you tons of time. Both lighten your load while saving you energy.

## Optimize lawn and garden care

Garden and lawn care can be very therapeutic. Studies have shown that gardening alone can help your mental and physical health. That being said, like anything, you can find a way to get a benefit beyond mental health. One option is to shift from peonies and bugleweed to tomatoes and strawberries. Growing your own veggies can be a great way to have a hobby that helps out with your bottom line. It's also a great way to spend time with children and teach them about healthy living and eating. Side note. If your kid grows kale, they will eat kale. Another option is a smart lawnmower. Like a robot vacuum for your lawn, you can save gas with these all-electric options—and save yourself the headache (and knee ache and backache).



## ENERGY- SAVING HABITS

### Use a smart thermostat

What makes these clever devices so fantastic is their learning capability. You won't be constantly monitoring your thermostat because the thermostat is monitoring itself. You no longer need to program the thermostat to adjust temperatures when you're away or asleep. This will also greatly reduce the totally epic Thermostat Wars in your home. While battling over the home's temp is fun, letting a thermostat take over will save you time and energy.

### Switch to LED bulbs

You'll be saving both energy and time again on this one. And when it comes to time, it's a pretty big deal. A good quality LED bulb can last three to five times longer than a CFL and up to 30 times longer than an incandescent bulb. That means years, sometimes decades, depending on the usage, between the oh-so-fun activity of changing bulbs. That also means fewer times perched up on a rickety ladder with an old bulb in one hand, balancing off the wall with your other hand and a fresh bulb in your mouth like some sort of cartoon character. No one wants this. So next time you're buying a bulb, get one that lasts—saving you time, energy and time on a rickety ladder.



### Seal windows and doors

This one's for everyone who's ever been on the giving or receiving end of a "Shut the door! Are you trying to heat (and/or cool) the entire neighborhood?" We know you have the more frugal of your relatives in your head every time you open a door and let those outside temps sneak in, but that relative could be on to something. By preventing drafts, air leakage and improperly installed insulation, you could save on the energy used to heat or cool your home. Sealing gaps has the added benefit of increasing the efficiency of your HVAC system, saving you the time and money it takes to purchase a replacement and the time it takes to frantically run around your home closing doors and windows, thinking every degree preserved can save the day. You've already saved the day, you Super Insulator you—but we'd close them anyway.

## Grab a smart power strip

The bad news? There's something called "Vampire Power" and it's when your many electronics go into standby mode, quietly sucking out your energy. The good news? You can pick up a smart power strip that can detect standby mode and fully turn off your devices automatically. This can save you the time and discomfort of shimmying under your desk in your home office trying to unplug that printer you use once every week to 10 business days to save money. Yes, you might've found that lucky pen you've been searching for under that desk, but in the long run, it's not worth your time. Get a pencil holder and a smart power strip.

So, get into the habit of good habits—and saving time. Building new habits is like building a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger you'll get. And use the One Percent Rule. Make a 1% improvement each day. This approach will allow you to continue to build your willpower muscles and progress in a manageable manner. It's the perfect way to stick to your habits and give yourself props for advancing daily. And it's how you'll build some habit momentum.

## DID SOMEONE SAY DRAFT?

When it comes to improving not only efficiency but comfort, nothing beats a good **home energy audit from BGE and EmPOWER** to help you find ways to save. They will test your home for air leakage (a prime culprit for drafts) along with assessing your home's insulation and checking for proper ventilation.



FEATURE

## EVERY NEIGHBOR HAS A

# Story

The people in and around Baltimore are remarkably diverse. In this issue, we help you get to know four of your fellow Marylanders.

The profiles that follow give you a taste of their lives—their homes, and the energy that powers their hobbies, their passions and pursuits. You'll also learn about the steps they've taken to use energy more efficiently for greater comfort, savings and peace of mind—all done with their individual flair.



# MEET Denver

Denver is someone who loves to stay connected. Connected to her home. To her family. And to the entire world. She's actually structured her life around doing just that.

Denver has a special bond with her mother and her grandparents. In fact, Denver's the full-time caretaker for her aging grandparents, who live just 10 minutes away from her Prince George's County condo. "What compels me to take care of them? They took care of me," she says.

About her mom, Denver says, "She's my best friend, but there are some boundaries. She reminds me every day that she's still my mother. But we do everything together."

A big part of that togetherness revolves around travel. Her mom says, "That generation just knows a little more about the technology. I try to keep updated with it, but they still seem to know more."

Looking at everything Denver does, her mom is rightly proud. "She's always been very self-sufficient, and very respectful," she says. "I don't think I could have asked for a better daughter. I'm very grateful."

The feeling is mutual. According to Denver, "My family empowers me by showing me every day how strong they are, how smart they are. And I want to continue these blessings that my grandparents and my mom have offered me."

## SMART THERMOSTAT

In addition to staying connected with her social media friends, Denver uses her phone to control things around her home, including her smart thermostat—as well as that of her grandparents.

Being able to keep them comfortable eases Denver's mind when she's away. If her grandparents are too hot or too cold, she can immediately adjust the temperature, whether she's on the other side of town or off on one of her trips.

Denver also likes the idea of adjusting the thermostat remotely to help her save in her own home.

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Find out how a smart thermostat can help you save. Go to [BGESmartEnergy.com/Denver4](https://BGESmartEnergy.com/Denver4) to learn more, including how you can get rebates up to \$100 on eligible models.

“  
I’m a responsible adult so I pay my bills, but I’d rather not spend money unnecessarily, especially when there’s always another adventure to plan.”





## QUICK HOME ENERGY CHECK-UP

Finding ways to reduce energy use isn't something exclusive to homeowners—renters can benefit as well. Adam and Rachel learned just how important those savings can be after their poor experience in a previous rental.

They expressed their concerns to their new landlord, who got in touch with BGE for a Quick Home Energy Check-up.

"When I got the Check-up, the guy came, he was super nice," says Adam. "He did an inspection to see where we could save. He installed smart power strips and LED light bulbs throughout the house. He gave us some water-saving showerheads. He even installed insulation around the pipes on my water heater."

Find out how a Quick Home Energy Check-up can help you save. Go to [BGESmartEnergy.com/Adam4](https://BGESmartEnergy.com/Adam4) to learn more or to schedule your own Check-up.

**“When I got the Check-up, the guy came, he was super nice. He did an inspection to see where we could save. He installed smart power strips and LED light bulbs throughout the house. He gave us some water-saving showerheads. He even installed insulation around the pipes on my water heater.”**

# MEET Adam

Talk to Adam, and you'll hear the word "amazing"—a lot. And when you learn more about his life, you can see why.

It all begins growing up in a neighborhood north of Baltimore. That's where he made his childhood friends that he's still close with even to this day.

Sure, they may have traded their skateboards for day jobs, but they still know how to have fun together. Most nights, they play video games online, chatting and catching up during even the most heated sessions.

Childhood friends aren't the only important people in Adam's life. He recently got engaged. "Rachel is the most supportive person in my life," Adam says. "We make time for one another. We're foodies, so we love going around Baltimore, Fell's Point, Canton, Fed Hill, and trying different restaurants. It's kind of perfect."

Rachel and Adam rent a row home in Baltimore City. Between game nights with friends, planning the upcoming wedding and working for NASA several days a week from his home office, it's quite the hub of activity.

Most of all, Adam appreciates the people in his life who are there for him. "It makes me feel good," he says. "It makes me feel ... amazing."

Truly amazing, indeed.



# MEET Jenny

Health, family, heritage—these things are central to Jenny's life. You see it the moment you step into Jenny's home, with its warm, welcoming colors. She says, "I love the beach. I'm a Caribbean girl, so I wanted to feel like I'm at the beach when I walk into the house."

And if Jenny is cooking—something she does often—you'll immediately be transported to the Dominican Republic. "If you come into my home and I'm cooking, you're going to feel that Caribbean heat," she says.

Jenny's meals are tasty and healthy. As someone who's passionate about fitness, she believes wellness starts in the kitchen. But it doesn't stop there. Jenny also teaches cardio fitness classes, along with Dominican folk dancing.

Family is at the heart of everything Jenny does. Sharing her home with her mother and her daughter creates a special kind of environment—three generations caring for one another, as they eat, laugh and play together.

"To see my daughter take her first steps, it actually did happen here at this house," Jenny says. "In the same way that I follow in the footsteps of my mom, now I get to pass that down to my daughter."

“

**I breathe better. I train better. I dance better here at the house. I'm sleeping better too. And at the same time I'm saving money, saving energy.**

## HVAC TUNE-UP

Jenny's focus on fitness and wellness has a surprising connection—her HVAC system. Because in addition to making sure the food she eats is healthy and nutritious, she also pays attention to the quality of the air in her home.

"It was important for me to do an HVAC Tune-up," Jenny says. "I breathe better. I train better. I dance better here at the house. I'm sleeping better too. And at the same time I'm saving money, saving energy."

Who knew a properly functioning HVAC system could do all that?

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Find out how an HVAC Tune-up can help your home and help you save. Visit [BGESmartEnergy.com/Jenny4](https://BGESmartEnergy.com/Jenny4) to learn more about her and to schedule your own Tune-up.



## HOME ENERGY AUDIT

Michael's ability to see the possibilities in things extends to his experience as a homeowner. A committed DIYer, he has renovated previous homes—making them more energy efficient.

This has involved everything from installing better insulation and windows to replacing all the bulbs with LEDs. He even added solar panels to the camper he built himself.

That extends to his latest home as well. Michael scheduled a home energy audit with BGE, and a certified contractor visited his home for a comprehensive evaluation and report.

According to Michael, "The home energy audit really helped us out quite a bit. It identified that our furnace was older, and it just wasn't efficient. So we replaced it with a very high-efficiency unit."

If it saves energy, Michael's all in.

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See for yourself how a home energy audit can help you save. Visit [BGESmartEnergy.com/Michael4](https://www.bgesmartenergy.com/Michael4) to learn more about his story and to book your own audit.

“  
There's this joy that I  
get by being creative  
and building things  
and having a vision.

# MEET Michael

Michael is someone who sees potential. It could be a vision for what a scrap of wood can become in his woodworking shop. A fragment of a melody that becomes a tune on his guitar. Or the chance to make deeper connections with his Native American heritage.

He says, "What I passed on to both of my boys is the idea of being productive, having a really good work ethic." And Michael's still that way.

For Michael, working hard and being productive is nothing new. He began playing drums professionally when he was just 12 years old. In subsequent decades he's focused on the guitar and writing his own music.

The urge to create is something he shares with his wife, Lisa, an accomplished artist. In a recent trip to Newfoundland, Lisa set up her easel and painted, while Michael set the mood with his acoustic guitar. That's real creativity at work.

As Michael adds, "There's this joy that I get by being creative and building things and having a vision. I've always felt gratitude. I wouldn't trade my life for anything."





Betsy Ramo at a 2025 Earth Day event at The Urban Oasis in Baltimore

## WHO DID IT BEST

# Recycling for a living

**BETSY DOES WHAT SHE LOVES—  
AND LOVES WHAT SHE DOES**

**Passionate. That's the perfect word to describe Betsy Ramo. Her passion for our environment drove her back to school to study environmental science. We met Betsy through our recycling program that offers rewards for old, working appliances. Now, she works for the city of Baltimore, sharing her passion for recycling with everyone. That viewpoint is probably best expressed when Betsy is at one of the many recycling events she contributes to throughout the year and through her community. We sat down with Betsy and found out what makes her tick.**

## Go ahead and introduce yourself.

My name is Betsy Ramo, and I'm the recycling associate with Baltimore City's Department of Public Works in the Office of Waste Diversion.

## How did all this begin?

I was actually a baker for many years. I went to culinary school and then decided I wanted to switch gears. Seeing firsthand the amount of food waste and things that go on in commercial kitchens.

I went back to school for a bachelor's in environmental science. That kind of switched my gears towards something like this.

I started working with the Department of Public Works in 2023. In terms of curbside recycling, thinking about food scraps and other hard-to-recycle items, all that is stuff I feel really passionate about.

## Did working in the restaurant scene feed a preexisting passion?

I think I was a little middle of the road before that. I started working in restaurants when I was 18 or 19. My family always recycled at our house. But just plastic bottles, aluminum cans, aluminum foil—your basic recyclables that you're doing at home. So, going into food service and seeing the waste kind of sparked something in me. As I got older, my passion for things like that definitely grew.

## What was the easiest thing you saw that would make the biggest difference?

I honestly think diverting your food scraps is really not a difficult thing to do. A lot of restaurants just don't even think about it. The last place I worked at, we did divert our food scraps, and it really wasn't extra work.

## How would you describe what you do, say, at a dinner party?

I do a lot of education and outreach. We go to schools and different local organizations that are having events. We'll show up there, hand out information, speak to residents about recycling and just get the word out around all the programs we offer.

There are so many free resources the city offers, so many opportunities to recycle items that

residents just don't know about. That is a big part of my work. I also organize our school recycling program and work directly with Baltimore City Public Schools to encourage more schools to sign up and have their recycling collected throughout the academic year. Because the city collects from Baltimore City Public Schools for free.

## Do you do your own recycling events as well?

We do. We partner with BGE along with other organizations and host [recycling and] shredding events four to five times a year, which are some of our larger events. That's where residents



BGE Appliance Recycling Event



can bring sensitive documents to be shredded on-site, and then all that paper is recycled. Because in Baltimore City, if you have a paper shredder at home, all that shredded paper can't go in your curbside recycle bin—it's not accepted because it messes with their sorting machines. So, we encourage people to bring their papers to these events. And it's totally free to the community.

**Tell us more about your experience with BGE at these events.**

BGE brings a lot of people to the events. The partnership increases our visibility because they're reaching different customers. BGE and EmPOWER Maryland give residents a way to get money back for the items they bring in. So, it's been really great.

**What's been your favorite interaction with residents at one of the events?**

It's fun when you go to a compost workshop. You get hands-on training, and you get a free take-home guide. You get a free compost bin if you decide you want to start composting in your backyard. At those events, people are always just so grateful for the hands-on knowledge and all the take-home stuff. It's really rewarding to see how happy people get from a small thing like a compost workshop.

Also, I think whenever kids come to any of the events—that's my favorite, because kids are so excited about recycling and just learning new things. It's so easy to get

them on board while trying to do something new. When we go to schools, we talk about recycling. They're so excited to go home and share that information. They learn with their families, right? So, I like teaching kids. It's so much easier than adults, who already have all this learned behavior. It's really hard to get folks to change, and kids are such little sponges.

I went to a school in the city, and the kids were so excited to tell us what their green team was doing and show us the bins for their classrooms—decorated cardboard boxes—to be their recycling bins. Last year, they had created anything they wanted out of materials they found in their recycling bins. They were so excited to share what they had come up with and so proud that it was all just stuff that would have otherwise been wasted.

**What items are just too small to recycle?**

We like to tell people if it's smaller than like 1/2 sheet of paper, it's not gonna make it. They're just gonna fall out, because everything gets dumped out onto large machines. And, while people are also there sorting along with the machines, it's just very easy for the small pieces of paper to not be recycled. So, it's a good rule of thumb.

**What does heading up the recycling program mean to you?**

It means a lot to me. I live in Baltimore City. Providing free resources to city residents is so important, and making sure that they know about it is also important. There are just so many good things that the city does that residents are just unaware of, and it's just getting out the information.



I feel passionate about making Baltimore a cleaner city, and that starts with recycling education and getting people to care. All of that starts with these interpersonal connections that we make at these events. You talk to a couple people, and they go home and talk to a couple more people, and it just spreads.

But I think it starts with passing along my passion for wanting Baltimore to be a better city. I think that kind of is infectious to other folks, and then they want to share that too. When they learn about all the free resources, residents are always so excited. We always get positive feedback from the events, especially when they're getting something out of it too. BGE's recycling rewards—those are the kind of things that they're gonna go back and tell their neighbors about and get people interested.



Do you have an old working appliance? Visit [bgesmartenergy.com/residential/help-me-save/appliance-recycling](https://bgesmartenergy.com/residential/help-me-save/appliance-recycling) for details or to schedule a pickup.

**“People are always just so grateful for the hands-on knowledge and all the take-home stuff.”**

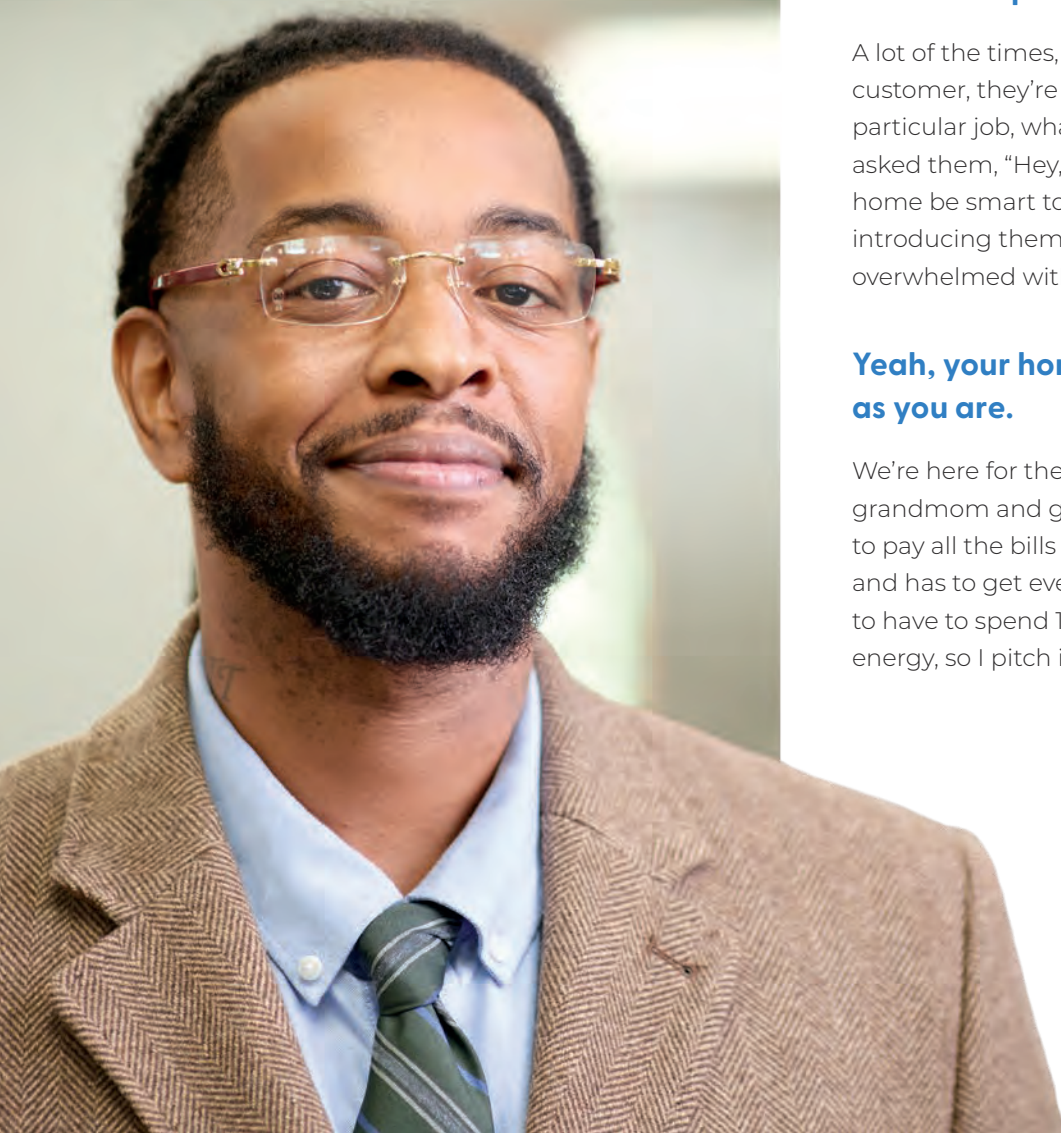




YOU'VE GOT THIS

# Talking Shop

*We sat down with a veteran of the home improvement game for insight on what makes a good customer—contractor experience*



His name is unique, which fits him perfectly. Junior Williams has an air about him. Calm, cool and confident in every environment he enters. His smile is disarming, and his advice on energy is invaluable. There was a time when Junior went from home to home, solving problems and saving the day. Now he manages other contractors and encourages them to master the art of problem-solving while constantly working on their energy efficiency bedside manner.

We sat down with Mr. Williams to pick his brain on what makes for a good customer experience.

## How do you approach building a relationship with a customer?

A lot of the times, when I'm talking to a customer, they're pretty smart and savvy in their particular job, whatever it is that they do. So, I asked them, "Hey, what if you could help your home be smart too?" That's a really great way of introducing them to energy, without them being overwhelmed with all the terminology.

## Yeah, your home should be as smart as you are.

We're here for the tired mom or dad and the grandmom and granddad. You know, who has to pay all the bills and has to pick everyone up and has to get everything done. He doesn't want to have to spend 10,000 hours on learning about energy, so I pitch in.

## I know you're managing contractors now, but have you done the contractor thing?

I had my own business, where I got my experience in the field, starting as a weatherization technician and working my way up. I saw an opportunity where I could take my experience, go get the certification and start a business.

## If you could create the perfect customer interaction, what would that look like?

I would say just probably like your average homeowner. They are experiencing stress. They believe their bill is higher than it should be. Don't be shy, and ask questions. Because it would help you in maximizing your opportunity. That'll be my big takeaway.

Right now, I believe energy efficiency is something that needs to be done. It's really a thing that you need to do to move forward because of how things are changing. For me, it's just helping the folks understand that change. "Do you know about energy efficiency? About EmPOWER Maryland? It's been around since 2008. Quick Home Energy Check-ups are included with your service and home energy audits are just \$100." I feel like it's that customer journey from end to end that saved me. It's just identifying the challenge and having a certain type of energy about solving that problem. That's what I want customers to understand, so they can start really taking advantage the right way.

## Practical tips for talking "contractor"

Whether you're planning a home energy audit, an HVAC equipment replacement or a major home renovation, it pays to have a plan and work with the right partners. Contractors and energy experts want what you want. They're here to help. Here are a few recommendations for building a good working relationship. These are focused on a home energy audit contractor but can also be used for more traditional home improvement.

- 1 Find the right contractor**  
Making sure you are comfortable with their experience and expertise is a vital first step in setting yourself up for success. If your project is for energy efficiency, check out [bgesmartenergy.com/residential/help-me-save/home-performance/find-contractor](https://bgesmartenergy.com/residential/help-me-save/home-performance/find-contractor) to start and end your search.
- 2 Preparation is key**  
Prep the area to ensure the contractor has easy and safe access to workspaces. If the visit involves the whole home, getting pets out from under their feet will make for a better visit.
- 3 Clarify the chain of command**  
Will you be talking to the contractor, a site manager or a subcontractor during the assessment? Know who your point of contact is—and make sure they know your preferred way to communicate (text, phone or email).
- 4 Set realistic expectations**  
Contractors aren't miracle workers. They work with weather, poor original builds and, sometimes, your 100-year-old electrical wiring. Discuss what the goals of the assessment may be and how to best reach them.
- 5 Show appreciation (and respect)**  
Contractors aren't just labor—they're experts. A little kindness goes a long way. Offer a bottle of water on hot days, say thank you often and give praise where it's due.

Bonus: Happy contractors are often more motivated to go the extra mile. And, you're laying the groundwork for future collaboration should you handle any recommended upgrades yourself.







*The combustion analyzer is used to measure carbon monoxide within a combustion-fueled appliance.*

### What discoveries do you make that are most surprising to them?

Homeowners are surprised when air is passing through their home. As far as air leakage is concerned, they think it's coming from the door and the windows. So, the temperature difference is because that door or that window doesn't have the same R value [insulating ability] as your walls.

### What questions would you love for them to ask that they don't?

"What's my potential to save?" I would love to hear that because we have the data to show it. We have tons of apps and tools. It's almost like a lottery ticket. You have an opportunity with your HVAC equipment. You have an opportunity with your lighting. You have an opportunity with this or that BGE and EmPOWER Maryland program. And, at the end of this lottery, you'll know your exact ability to reduce energy use.

### And then they have a sense of control.

The customer has always been in control. It's helping them understand more so I can help them. So, it's about relationship building, trying

to get someone to agree to participate in these programs. Let me strengthen your idea and understanding of your potential. When they are in control, it makes the customer feel better on their own.

### How long does it take them to realize that you're here to solve problems and help?

I'm not coming in and acting like I'm in charge. When you come prepared, you can share your case study directly next door with the neighbors. So, before I'm walking through the door, I'm dependent on the community I am in. When that happens, I get accepted really easily.

Regardless of the community or the culture, someone will say, "You work for BGE?" I say, "I also have a utility bill. And we're here to help." People smile when you meet frustration with a smile. And that energy—it's legitimate. I told them they didn't have to participate today. This is here for you. I am here for you.

### These people, they're your neighbors.

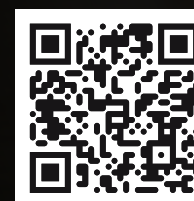
When you're smiling, seriously, it changes the game for the customer. It's almost like a new mentality that we all have to get together. We only share the win because that's what I'm here for. It's a shared win.

It puts them not just in control of the program but in control of their future. And then it just becomes to me a joyous experience, a great memory. Now I have friends all over. It's called "Small-timore" for a reason. I always had a bunch of friends all over the place. But now, now it's crazy. I know everybody everywhere, and to me, it creates ownership, like a sense of "I belong."



## Is energy leaving your home the same way you do?

Older homes are brimming with charm—and drafts. A home energy audit can help you finally get comfortable and provide recommendations that could **lower your energy costs by up to 20%**. You could even qualify for an average of **\$3,000 in rebates** to make the recommended home improvements. Don't let those fly out the door either.



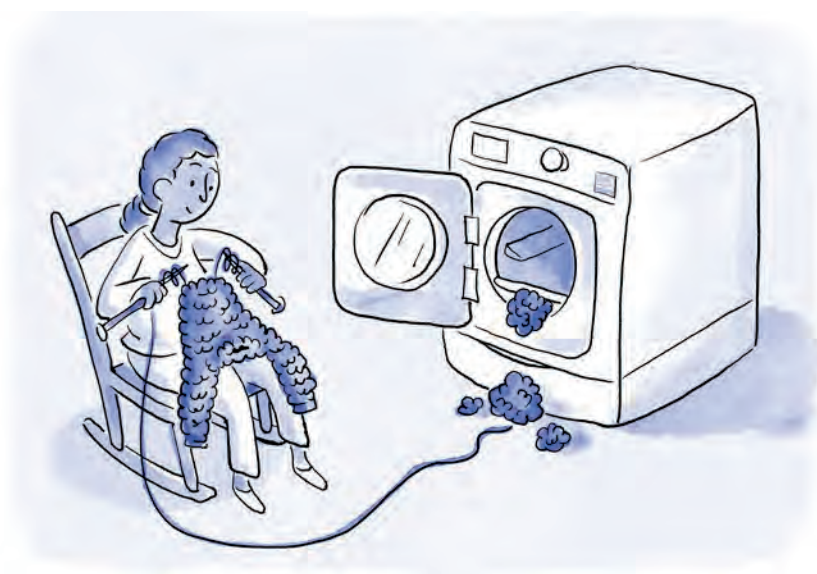
Request your home energy audit today at **BGESmartEnergy.com/HomePerformance4** or scan the QR code.

EmPOWER Maryland programs are funded by a charge on your energy bill. EmPOWER programs can help you reduce your energy consumption and save you money. To learn more about EmPOWER and how you can participate, go to **BGESmartEnergy.com**.



COMIC CONVERSATION

CAPTION THIS!



Please use the provided QR code or email [residential@BGESmartEnergy.com](mailto:residential@BGESmartEnergy.com) to submit your caption for the cartoon. The best one will appear in our next edition.

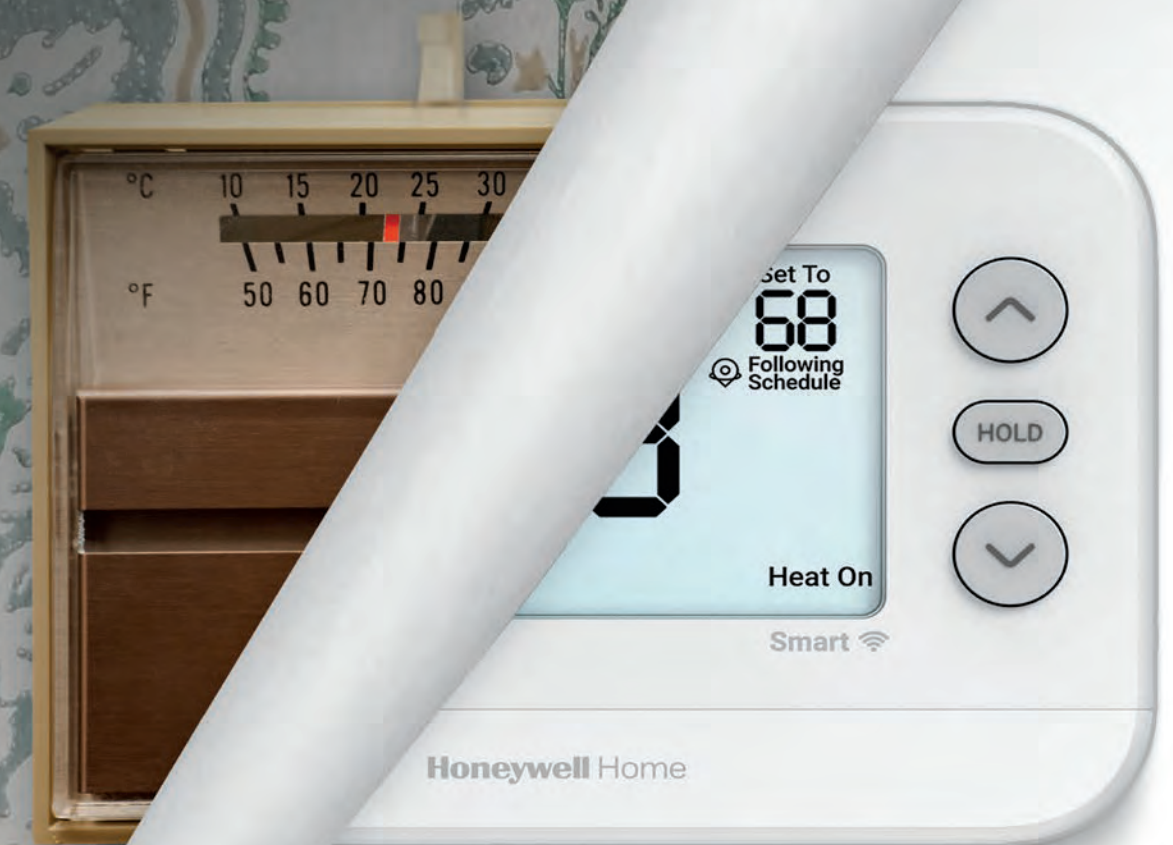


ISSUE THREE WINNING CAPTION

**“I’ve got your pawn.”**  
**“I’ve got your batteries.”**  
— BRAD T.

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It's not “vintage.”  
It's inefficient.



It's time to turn the page on that old thermostat. When you get an HVAC Tune-up through BGE, you may qualify for a new smart thermostat—installation included. Both come at **no additional cost**. Both can help you save energy.



Request an appointment today.  
Visit [BGESmartEnergy.com/Tuneup4](http://BGESmartEnergy.com/Tuneup4)  
or scan the QR code.

EmPOWER Maryland programs are funded by a charge on your energy bill. EmPOWER programs can help you reduce your energy consumption and save you money. To learn more about EmPOWER and how you can participate, go to [BGESmartEnergy.com](http://BGESmartEnergy.com).



# Saving energy isn't a competition, or is it?

With BGE's My Account, not only can you better control your own energy use, you can also see how you compare with neighbors for inspiration. Detailed insights and tips put you in position to make informed decisions, save money and keep you out front in the world of reducing energy usage.

## How you compare to others



Sign up today at  
**BGE.com/MyAccount4**  
or scan the QR code.

EmPOWER Maryland programs are funded by a charge on your energy bill. EmPOWER programs can help you reduce your energy consumption and save you money. To learn more about EmPOWER and how you can participate, go to **BGESmartEnergy.com**.