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Berks-based Seniors Helping Seniors expands to 100 franchises

By Dan Kelly
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Kiran and Philip W.S. Yocom started Seniors Helping Seniors as a non-profit agency to link seniors who need help staying in their homes with seniors who are more self-sufficient and looking to remain active. That was 1998.

Kiran was running the business out of an office in the couples' Wyomissing Hills, PA home.

On Jan. 27, 2006, Seniors Helping Seniors announced it was expanding from its Berks County base and turning into a for-profit franchise system, largely because of the demand for services to the elderly. Older Americans are the fastest growing demographic in the U.S. and most of them want to remain independent in their own homes, Kiran said.

Seniors Helping Seniors franchise brochures also point to a U.S. Department of Labor prediction that within the next decade, 54 percent of workers will be involved in caring for an elderly person.

Franchises, available nationwide, were going for \$25,000.

A little more than four years later, Seniors Helping Seniors has 100 franchises in 30 states.

"Two years from now, we will be No. 1 in the business," Kiran Yocom said.

Seniors Helping Seniors will hold its national convention Friday in the Crowne Plaza Reading, Wyomissing, to discuss this and other big corporate news, Yocom said.

A native of New Dehli, Yocom said she grew up in a wealthy family and spent much of her time doing charity work, including working for 14 years with Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the Missionaries of Charity in the slums of India.

Yocom said she credits the Reading Eagle for being the first to publicize the business she co-founded with her husband, Philip, who has a 25-year history in the franchising business.

Kiran originally ran the business out of a home office, but the couple moved the operation to the current location at 2561 Bernville Road, Bern Township, as the business quickly took off. Kiran, who is chairwoman of Seniors Helping Seniors, said her husband is now president and chief executive and her daughter, Namrata, is a vice president of the family-owned business.

State Rep. Dante Santoni, a Muhlenberg Township Democrat, and his wife, Sharon Santoni, own one of 11 Seniors Helping Seniors franchises in Pennsylvania.

The agency employs seniors to help other older people in Berks with shopping, cooking and other nonmedical needs. Seniors Helping Seniors puts seniors in need, or receivers, in touch with seniors willing to work helping them, working for an hourly wage. The agency charges a transaction fee for putting the two parties together. The amount of the fee depends on the type and amount of work.

Seniors Helping Seniors attracted the attention of Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, who visited the Yocombs in July 2005, for their annual party for their clients.