



CJ Carnacchio

News

Business gives seniors chance to help other seniors

August 19, 2009 - Getting older isn't easy for many folks, especially when the body or the mind, or both, begins to fail them.

They want to stay in their own homes, but it's too much work for them on their own.

They want to maintain their independence, but they also want a little companionship.

They need some help with the basics of life, but they want to maintain their dignity.

Fortunately, those spending their Golden Years in the Oxford/Addison area can call upon the in-home services of Seniors Helping Seniors (SHS), which matches seniors who want to provide help with seniors who are looking for help.

"As our senior community grows, it just makes sense to bring seniors together," said Oxford resident Dawn Neely, who co-owns the local franchise with her husband of five years, Bob Neely. "It's so much easier to receive assistance from someone that you feel really does understand what you're going through and can relate to the issues you're dealing with."

The Neelys established their Seniors Helping Seniors franchise in Oakland County in February 2008. They serve Oxford, Addison, Brandon, Orion and 18 other communities.

"We have concentrated on our local community for the most part right now," Dawn said. "It was really important for us to touch our local community first."

SHS currently has 17 "very active" senior-to-senior matches and several seniors who receive care on a more infrequent basis.

"There's a need right now for providers, for caregivers," Dawn noted.

SHS provides a full-range of home care, companion and home maintenance support services, all of which are "100 percent, nonmedical," according to Dawn.

"Whatever our seniors needs are we can meet them," she said. Services include light housekeeping, meal preparation, transportation, laundry, personal grooming, minor home repairs, yard work and errands.

"The most rewarding part is knowing in some shape or fashion, we've made a difference in somebody's day," Dawn said. "We've helped them live independently and stay in their homes. We think that's where we are the healthiest and happiest, surrounded by our things, our memories."

Services usually cost from \$17 to \$19 per hour and there's a two-hour minimum. Medical insurance doesn't cover SHS services, however, long-term care insurance does.



Seniors Helping Seniors - (from left) Office Manager Dawn Foltz, Co-owner Dawn Neely, Caregiver Nancy Lovell and Co-owner Bob Neely. Photo by C.J. Carnacchio.

Although the services form the meat and potatoes of the business, they're not the heart and soul.

That comes from the relationships developed between the caregivers and recipients.

Bob said it's "pretty amazing" to watch two complete strangers "come together and instantly bond."

"There's a comfort level that's created immediately when they know that they're talking to somebody who really does understand and relate to what they're going through," Dawn said.

Bob recalled an instance in which a caregiver and client learned they were both from the same country originally. The caregiver then made the client a special soup from their native land.

"She didn't have to do that," Bob said. "She did it because she wanted to."

It's the caregivers that really separate SHS from other in-home services companies.

"We love what we're doing, but we couldn't do it without the incredible providers that we have," Dawn said. "Our caregivers are amazing."

"The really cool thing about our providers is they're doing it because they want to, not because they have to. It's really important to us that that basic concept be shared by our caregivers."

"They're everything to our business," Bob noted. "They make the difference."

SHS only hires seniors who have "the right spirit and the right heart."

"We want someone who's really here because they want to care for somebody. It's got to be more than just a job for them," Bob explained. "If it's just a job, then you're not going to go there to develop a relationship. You're just going to go in there to take care of a service."

"Our providers truly feel they receive more or at least just as much out of this as they give," Dawn noted.

Most of SHS caregivers have experience caring for their own loved ones, are retired nurses or have a background helping others through churches or service clubs.

"Our senior caregivers have been doing this all their lives," said Dawn, noting they earn \$8.50 per hour.

Those who don't have a lifetime of experience needn't worry. All that's really required to work for SHS is a desire to help and a willingness to develop a relationship with a fellow senior in need.

"We're always looking for people who really share the heart and spirit of Seniors Helping Seniors," Dawn said. "There isn't a specific training required for the types of services we're providing."

For more information about SHS please visit www.seniorshelpingseniors.com. Those interested are also welcome to call (248) 969-4000 or e-mail seniors@shs-mi.com.

CJ Carnacchio is editor for The Oxford Leader.