

## Partners In Care model is right at home

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January 2005

When entrepreneurs Don and Sally Olin began looking for caregivers for their elderly parents who wanted to remain independent at home, they discovered a void in the market.

"It was a real struggle, we were dependent on people who were not service oriented," says Don Olin. "We thought there must be some kind of company you can call."

When they couldn't find one, they created one – Partners In Care. The result: a business that grew by 125% in its second year and has quickly built a reputation as a model for home care among area nonprofits.

Partners In Care provides nonmedical in-home care in Mecklenburg, Rowan, Union and Cabarrus counties.

"People want to live independently at home for as long as they can," says Don Olin. "And not everyone has the ability financially to live in an assisted-living facility."

While taking care of the needs of their own families, the Olins learned demand for in-home care is only going to grow as baby boomers and their parents age.

According to Census projections, about 70 million Americans will be 65 or older by 2030. In North Carolina alone, the over-65 population increased by 21% between 1990 and 2000.

The Olins, both in their early 50s, had already raised a family of three and wrapped up fulfilling careers – Sally in the field of nursing and Don as president of Atlas Food Brokerage Co.

Starting a new company had not been part of their plan, but soon it began to make sense for the couple, who weren't ready to retire. "We never thought it would get as big as it has," Don Olin says.

The privately held company does not disclose financial results. Its revenue comes from a combination of about 60% private paying clients, 30% whose services are covered by Medicaid and 10% through other benefit providers such as the Veteran's Administration and workers compensation.

Services include light housekeeping, medication reminders, shopping trips and laundry.

While Partners In Care does not provide skilled nursing, the Olins had to go through a state licensing process with the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services to qualify as a Medicaid services provider.

The company's oldest client is 99 years old, while its youngest is 19 years old. About 80% of the business comes from senior citizens.

Janet LeClair, Wachovia Corp. senior vice president, hired Partners In Care to help her mother, who has Alzheimer's disease, remain at home with the family. "One of the big challenges is that you want to do the best for your parents, but you can't put your life on hold," says the mother of four. "My mother was fiercely independent and strong minded. She never wanted to go to a nursing home."

This month, Partners In Care teamed with the Red Cross and the Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library to teach courses for the American Red Cross Family Caregiving Program. The series is designed to help family members learn the basic skills of caring for loved ones in the home. "Whether it's teaching someone how to take care of nutritional needs or emotional needs, these are all important to someone getting older, or someone who is disabled," says Louise St. Germain, Red Cross spokeswoman.

For more information on the Red Cross family program, contact the Health Education Department at the America Red Cross at (704) 347-8214.



Don and Sally Olin's venture is a second career for both.