



Helping seniors help themselves

New franchise provides Paige Richmond of the Gateway

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In a lifetime of careers, Bill King feels that opening a Senior Helpers franchise has been the most fulfilling.

“It really touched our heart, and it made sense for Gig Harbor,” he said about the non-medical in-home caregiver business he opened in November with his wife, Cindy Harrison-King. King, 48, had worked for a high-tech company and in the mortgage industry, opened a design firm and was briefly retired before buying a Senior Helpers franchise. He and Harrison-King — who spent 23 years as a wholesale and correspondence rep for a mortgage company — had talked about starting their own business for more than a decade before actually taking the plunge.

It was a series of personal experiences that inspired the Kings to consider caregiving.

Harrison-King’s first experience came when she briefly worked as a nurse’s maid at Harbor Place at Cottesmore. When she and King moved to Portland, Ore., in the 1980s, they became caregivers for friends who were suffering from AIDS. They were shocked by how often their ailing friends were treated as second-class citizens. “It left an indelible mark on me, because no one would sign up to help,” King said. King was also affected by family experiences with in-home care. His father had a stroke at 58 and required care for the next 20 years of his life.

King’s mother and brother took on the responsibility, and King observed how difficult it was to find outside care that rivaled the quality a family can provide for an ailing loved one.

“It just seemed off to me why it was so hard to find help,” he said.

The couple noticed there was a need in Gig Harbor for in-home care. When Harrison-King, 46, started researching franchise options with Senior Helpers, she discovered that no in-home care providers were offering services in the area.

“There are places in Tacoma and Silverdale, but they don’t come down this far,” she said.

It was Senior Helpers’ high standard of care and strict screening process for hiring employees that appealed to the couple. According to the company’s Web site, Senior Helpers’ goal is to provide

“professional care to people who wish to remain independent at home instead of moving to a facility.” Before a caregiver is placed in a senior’s home, Harrison-King meets with the family to determine what kind of care the client will need — companion or personal care.

Companion care includes activities such as conversation, housekeeping, meal preparation and transportation. Personal care includes all companion services, plus help with bathing, dressing, grooming and other physical activities.

Senior Helpers’ also offers a Peace of Mind Visit, a one-hour appointment when a caregiver simply checks in on a senior, making sure that all is well — an act that gives the senior’s family “peace of mind.”

They hope to provide their clients with the same care they would expect for their own family members. Harrison-King has interviewed qualified potential caregivers only to have those applicants fail a background check or show up late to training.

It is that kind of behavior that the company will not tolerate in employees.

“If we’re guaranteeing someone will be out there to take care of your mom and dad, you’ve got to be where you say you’re going to be,” Harrison-King said.

Senior Helpers also provides a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week answering service for clients.

Harrison-King emphasizes that the rates and prices are affordable for the care Senior Helpers provides. Hourly and daily care range from \$21 to \$47 per hour, depending on the type of care provided and the amount of hours needed. Live-in care ranges from \$250 to \$325 per hour.

Although the couple has been building their business since last summer — and have hired more than 30 caregivers —they have yet to take on any clients. They hope to eventually build the business and pass it on to their son, Conor, who is 6 years old.

“We’re not just planning to build this franchise and sell it off,” King said. “We want to stay with it.”

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