

Norwalker in the business of lending a helping hand

It's been 12 years since Norwalk resident Luis Petrillo moved to the United States from Brazil and four since he moved to Connecticut. Throughout that time, Petrillo's employment situation has run the gamut; he's jumped from positions at American Express to Washington Mutual, and he's tried everything in between. When the recession hit hard and Petrillo became unemployed, he found himself doing some soul searching as he sought a career that would be more rewarding for himself and the community at-large.

"After one downsizing after another," he recalled, "I tried to do something different."

Petrillo said he soon learned about Home Helpers, a national organization that allows entrepreneurs to open their own franchises focused on providing non-medical in-home care services to seniors, new mothers, those recovering from illness or injury and individuals facing lifelong challenges.

And that was all Petrillo needed to hear.

"I decided to invest all my reserves into this small business," he said. "It was a good decision. I'm doing something that I like. I'm helping people."

Petrillo said Home Helpers was the perfect business opportunity for him, as he had already spent much of his time growing up providing care to his mentally challenged sister and aging grandparents. He said his personal experiences taught him not only how to provide personal care but also to manage the emotional stress involved with having loved ones in need.

Today, his services are once again assisting those who need it. His Home Helpers business serves Norwalk, Westport, Darien, New Canaan, Greenwich and Stamford. Bathing, dressing, feeding, grocery shopping and companionship are just a few of the senior services Home Helpers provides. Light housekeeping, laundry, prescription pick-up and meal preparation are some of the things the company provides new moms so they can spend more time with their babies. Some of the specialty care areas Home Helpers' staff members are trained in are Alzheimer's, dementia, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's and diabetes as well as other physical and mental challenges.

"The project started at the end of last year, and I ended up buying the franchise at the end of January," he explained, noting that his Home Helpers business opened on May 1. Four weeks later, he had his first customer.

"I feel like the wind is in our favor," he said.

Petrillo explained since his franchise's inception, he has built up a staff of 15, which assists with the driving duties, bathing, cooking and other day-to-day needs of clients.

"It's very methodical and organized," he said.

"During this economic downturn, I lost my job," he remembered. "I said 'No more. I need to take care of my own future. Let's start a business.' In doing this, I was not only starting my own business, but I was employing people when people were losing their jobs."

He added, "It was one of those moments where you think, 'What am I going to do with my life?'"

But it's an endless enthusiasm and an unrelenting concern for others that has kept Petrillo motivated to endure tough times and to come out unscathed on the other side, ready to create a successful franchise geared towards the well-being of needful people.

"The most important piece is that I left Brazil and never really felt like I fit in here," he said. "I feel like I fit in here much more now. I'm networking. I'm meeting with families. It's much more fulfilling."

When Petrillo finishes work for the day – which is often draining as he deals with both the mentally and physically ill – the feeling, he said, is unmatched.

"I feel good in that I've done something with my day. I just have that ability to deal with people in need."

And though certain procedures and rules must be followed in opening any Home Helpers franchise, Petrillo said he has enjoyed flexibility with his business – something that was absent from his life in previous jobs.

"I am very pleased that I am in the business," he said.

For all those out there struggling with job loss or financial hardship, Petrillo has one important piece of advice: "Sometimes things work out in a way where it looks bad, but in reality it's the best thing for you."

For a free in-home consultation, call 642-4588.