

A Helping Hand

San Diego mom finds business fix, fulfills desire to aid others with Home Helpers

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By Martin Desmarais

SAN DIEGO, Calif. – The tech downswing and the desire to start a family drew Nandini Chinnagiri away from the business world close to a decade ago, but the entrepreneurial lure and the quest to have an impact on others has brought her back. And franchise chain Home Helpers has been her vehicle in doing so.

A native of Bangalore, India, Chinnagiri came to the United States in 1995 and settled in Dallas while her husband, Ashok, was working at Texas Instruments, Inc. With a bachelor's degree in accounting and commerce from Bangalore University, Chinnagiri shifted gears and studied computer science at a local college. Later in the decade, when her husband took a job with semiconductor company MaxLinear Corp. in Carlsbad, Calif., the couple moved to the San Diego area and Chinnagiri attended California State University San Marcos and continued her transition into computer science. She graduated from the school in 2002 with a bachelor's degree in her new field.

However, the struggles of the tech industry at that time forced her to rethink her career plans and she decided to take some time off and start a family. She had her daughter, Natasha, who is now 4 years old, and focused on raising her. She also kept busy managing real estate investments her husband made.

But recently Chinnagiri once again felt the lure of the business world and decided to pursue options back into business. "I am ready to go back and pursue my dream again and do something for myself," she said. "Ever since I was a little girl, and when I was in college, I wanted to be an entrepreneur."

Though she an education in computer science her research into business options led her to the franchise industry. According to Chinnagiri, she read an article about how the franchise industry was booming, despite the economy, and right at the top of that list was the Home Helpers concept.

Started in 1997, the Cincinnati-based Home Helpers is a senior care franchise specializing in non-medical and personal care and companionship for seniors, new mothers, those recovering from illness or injury and individuals facing lifelong challenges. Home Helpers offices are locally owned and operated, backed by a national network of resources. The chain has 400 franchises, mostly in the United States with a few in Canada, and is predominantly on the East Coast with a growing representation in the western part of the country.

Home Helpers was recently ranked the No. 1 senior care franchise and "Best of the Best" by Entrepreneur magazine for the fourth straight year. Home Helpers is affiliated with Direct Link In-Home Emergency Monitoring, a 24-hour in-home emergency monitoring system that provides services to seniors to help them feel safer and live independently at home.

The concept struck a nerve with Chinnagiri, who said she had experience tremendous care during her pregnancy. "I wanted to do something with health care and that was senior related," she said. "I have great respect for caregivers."

In February 2009 Chinnagiri visited Home Helpers' corporate headquarters and listened to Chief Executive Officer and founder Gary Green speak. That was all it took for her and she called him very inspiring. "I decided to pick Home Helpers right after I heard him," she said.

In addition, Home Helpers provided some help with the financing to get her franchise off the ground. "That gave me enough confidence to pick them because they were willing to put their own money into the business," said Chinnagiri.



Home Helpers is a senior care franchise that provides non-medical and personal care and companionship for seniors, new mothers and those recovering from illness or injury. The Cincinnati-based chain has 400 franchises in North America. Pictured above are Home Helpers owner Becky Pickett (right) and her mother Vernie P. Langford of Greer, S.C. Photo courtesy of Home Helpers

By the end of summer, Chinnagiri was all set to open her Home Helpers franchise covering La Hoya and Mira Mesa.

As a new mother, Chinnagiri also relishes the fact that Home Helpers is a home based business and she can run it out of her house. But that does not mean she is just sitting still. A big part of the business is drumming up business and to do so she has to get out and about in the community and educate about Home Helpers services, particularly with seniors many of whom she believes may not know these types of services exist.

"There are a lot of places where they can go to get help," Chinnagiri said. "They do not have to be helpless in their Golden Years."

There are two major hospitals in her territory so she said another key is connecting with them to make sure the doctors can recommend Home Helpers to patients that are good candidates.

As a Home Helpers' franchisee, Chinnagiri works to establish a network of caregivers, who will provide the services to clients. When Chinnagiri gets a client she meets with them to find out what they require and then connects them with a caregiver. She said she intends to personally meet all her clients before the caregivers meet them and also plans to be back to make sure everything is going well.

She does not look at her leap into the franchising industry as just an investment opportunity with her tabulating the bottom line and a manager running. "I want to be involved with this business the whole time," she said. "When I chose this business I wanted something that I didn't just hand over to someone else."

Aside from her immediate connection with the service that Home Helpers provided, Chinnagiri also pointed out that she saw great potential for the concept. "Like any businessman I was also looking for a business that was growing," she said.

According to facts provided by Home Helpers, the senior care industry is just that.

The company points out:

- Seniors over 85 are the fastest growing segment of the global society. They are looking for long term care, health care, retirement and nursing home facilities and home care services more than any generation before them
- As the years have progressed people are having less children therefore leaving fewer children to help ailing seniors
- The latest numbers from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that care giving is predicted to be the second fastest-growing field over the next decade
- Nationwide, the personal and home-care aide classification is expected to grow by more than 50 percent between 2006 and 2016, increasing from 767,000 to a projected 1.15 million jobs
- Beginning in 2011 baby boomers will turn 65 at the rate of 10,000 a day
- Seniors are having a hard time selling their homes in this market, making it impossible for them to afford nursing homes or assisted living facilities and wondering how to get the help they need at a cost-effective price
- According to the AARP, nine out of 10 people surveyed would prefer to receive long-term care services in their own home or community
- The average cost of in-home care is \$12,600 a year or \$34.50 per day. In a nursing home it would be more than \$55,000 a year or \$153 per day



Emma Dickison, president of Home Helpers, said that, like Chinnagiri, many of the chain's franchisees connect with the type of service that Home Helpers provides and are very excited about the potential growth for the industry.

"It is a great opportunity," she said. "It is an awesome mission to be able to go home every day and feel good about being able to help those who can't help themselves for whatever reason."

Dickison

According to her, Home Helpers' franchisees come from a variety of backgrounds, but many have experienced caring for loved ones and know the difference such care can make in their lives. More than anything else, she said the franchisees have a real passion for what they do.

"They want to make a difference in their communities," she said. "They are all committed to a mission of making a difference."

For Chinnagiri that commitment is obvious as she starts out on her Home Helpers career. "I am really excited and I am scared – like any other business person," Chinnagiri said. "This is something that is absolutely necessary for some people and something that people can't live without and my plan is to go out and find these people and help them."