

Friend Inspires Home Helpers

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July 30 – Tony and Jeanene Chieffo learned how important a person's independence is after they took care of a friend with leukemia.

That's why the Newtown couple in April 2009 bought a Home Helpers franchise and invested in the Direct Link In-Home Monitoring service offered by the Cincinnati-based home-care firm, founded in 1997 with about 300 franchisees across the United States.

"While helping our friend, we saw a need in the community for this because people don't know who to turn to for help with family members and friends," Tony Chieffo said. "It opened our eyes that people out there needed assistance."

The Direct Link device, which is the size of a small book, can be activated by a pendant around a client's neck to give name, address, medical information and other critical data to a Home Helper representative. Jeanene Chieffo said the device has personal significance to her.

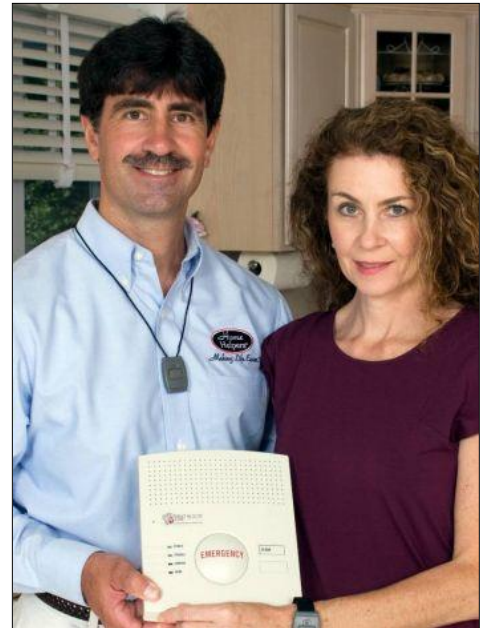
"My mother was taking care of my grandfather, who fell down a flight of stairs after she left for the day," she said, adding that the client also can talk with the representative through the unit. "He passed away from his fall."

Direct Link costs \$30 a month for the service, and is installed in the home free of charge. Customers are given two pendants, Jeanene Chieffo said.

"We like to keep a pendant in the bathroom because that's where many falls happen," she said.

The couple, who had previous experience in the corporate world, were looking to start a business, and opening a franchise offering home care seemed like the perfect fit, Tony Chieffo said.

"I like the franchise because it's a proven model," he said. "They carry you through the whole process."



Tony Chieffo said they have gained about 15 home-care clients and another two dozen Direct Link patrons, since buying a Home Helper franchise, which costs \$20,000 to \$40,000.

"We customize all of our care plans from companionship to more personal care," he said, adding that home care can cost from \$18 to \$30 an hour to \$180 to \$300 a day for live-in service, depending on the number of caregivers. "This is not only for the senior community, but for anyone who needs assistance."

Direct Link's feature of providing a client's medical information can help emergency services better surmise his or her condition upon arrival, said Michael Carius, chairman of the department of emergency medicine at Norwalk Hospital.

"The more information they have, the better off the patient is," he said.

Starting a franchise in the home-care industry is challenging because the market is crowded as a result of the low cost to buy a home-care franchise, most of which usually go for less than \$40,000, said Steve Dubin, president of the New England Franchise Association.

"With so many competitors, it can mean less chance for success with a limited number of prospects, and the lower pricing can also mean less skin in the game, which can result in less commitment," he said.

Most franchisors prefer franchisees with no experience in their respective industries so that they do not bring any negative practices or habits into the business, Dubin said.

"They're looking for people with open minds, open hearts and a great work ethic," he said.

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