

## Local couple expanding their business with new Home Helpers franchise

Registered nurses Cindy and Tim O'Bryan, who grew up in Hancock County, have started Owensboro's first Home Helpers agency with a goal of expanding into Henderson, Newburgh and Evansville.

Home Helpers is a national company whose franchise owners provide non-medical, in-home services that may include help with daily living activities and companionship.

An affiliation with a national brand will give the couple additional resources to enhance and expand the business they started about six years ago called Guardian Angels, Tim O'Bryan said.

The O'Bryans said they expect the competitive senior care market to continue to be a big part of their focus, however, the new franchise will let them branch out to provide in-home services for new moms and mothers with full-time jobs including care for other children in the home.

Home Helpers can provide services for two hours or 24 hours, and for one day or seven days per week, the owners said. The workers can take clients to doctor's appointments or shopping or can help them with dressing and bathing, they said.

"Just about anything that doesn't have to do with medical — we can do for them," Tim O'Bryan said.

Recuperative care also is among their services.

"We also want to start providing home services for special needs children," Cindy O'Bryan said.

Tim and Cindy O'Bryan graduated from Hancock County High School. Cindy earned her nursing degree from Kentucky Wesleyan College's nursing program in 1996.

"After Cindy graduated, I quit the construction business and got my RN degree from KWC in 1999," Tim O'Bryan said. Tim's mother, Carolyn O'Bryan, is a nurse who retired last year from the Hancock County Health Department.

"We knew nursing would always be an area where there would be a need," he said. The young O'Bryans worked together in the emergency department at Owensboro Medical Health System. Cindy also has worked in an Owensboro pediatrician's office. In 2001, Tim O'Bryan started working with an agency that placed him at Jewish Hospital in Louisville.

"I got tired of the traveling," he said. Cindy O'Bryan said she learned from her hospital patients of their needs once they left the ER.

"A lot of the time, there just was no time to spend with patients to provide individual care in that setting," she said. "I really didn't like that. This was before several other agencies started offering some of the needed services in Owensboro, she said.

"I talked to Tim, and I told him how I was hearing people's stories and there was a need for this," Cindy said. "When I would go to discharge a patient, I realized they would need additional care at home."



Home Helpers franchise owner Tim O'Bryan, left, removes a sock from Lucy Strehl's foot as nursing assistant Connie Simmons waits to help Strehl put on a compression sleeve Wednesday at her home in the 3500 block of Monticello Drive. Home Helpers is a national company whose franchise owners provide non-medical, in-home services. Photo by Gary Emord-Netzley

They started Guardian Angels in 2005. The O'Bryans are transitioning their Guardian Angels clients to their new Home Helpers company. They have about 10 employees working with them now. The couple has always conducted criminal background checks on potential employees before hiring them, Tim O'Bryan said, even before that became law. They also do pre-employment and random drug screenings.

"Some of our employees have worked with us since we started," he said.

Most employees are certified nursing assistants, he said. The rest are patient care technicians.

"We provide rigorous training; we teach them what we expect," he said.

The O'Bryans are looking for new office space in Owensboro. For now, their offices are in their home. Payment for Home Helpers services is out of pocket, but the company accepts long-term care insurance, Tim O'Bryan said.

The agency also connects clients to other services when appropriate, he said. The business also is affiliated with Direct Link medical alert units, which provide 24-hour personal emergency response systems.

Home Helpers also offers what the O'Bryans call an "Elder Check" service in which an employee will stop by and make a daily 10 to 15-minute visit.

"If there is a noticeable change in their demeanor, we will alert the next of kin," Tim O'Bryan said.

The worker also can take care of small tasks such as taking the mail inside or making a sandwich, he said.

Cindy O'Bryan's mother, Belva Baker, was diagnosed with cancer four years ago.

"When I was taking care of her, I realized that we were doing good with our business providing these services and doing a good thing for the community," she said.

Tim O'Bryan feels that elderly people often get left out and forgotten.

"I enjoy what I do," he said. "The elderly really need help, and we're here to help with services."