

Helping Seniors to Stay at Home

By Sophie Braccini

The Edwards want to stay in their home for as long as possible. The couple have been Orinda residents for 50 years, raised their family, and now in their 80's will not let physical ailments get the better of them. When Jeannette recently broke her elbow, her son Lee helped secure the daily assistance the couple was going to need. As caregivers had been hard to find and hard to keep, they decided to contact professional services. One of them was "Senior Helpers" of Moraga, established in June 2007 by Kevin Reneau.

After he retired from his job with the UC Berkeley Athletic Department, Reneau was ready to start a new life and run his own business. When he came across the franchise opportunity offered by Senior Helpers, a 7 years old service provider company, he knew this was the right opportunity for him and his wife, Pam. Senior services are in high demand and Lamorinda seemed like the right place to provide it.

According to Senior Helpers' research, there were 5,269 seniors age 75 and better living in Lamorinda in 2004 (8.2% of the total population) and that population should amount to 5,786 by 2009. Most seniors do their best when they can stay in their community and many families try to keep their commitments to their relatives. "Caring for aging parents can take a toll on families and/or spouses," comments Reneau, "and that's when our services come into play."

Senior Helpers provide elders with in-home care and companionship in the form of a familiar paid employee. Services range from reading, transportation to social or medical appointments, to more engaged services

such as grooming, personal care, medication reminder and house keeping if necessary.

Since he started his venture, Reneau has been interviewing an average of 20 caregivers a week, applying a rigorous screening process. Potential workers have to have senior care experience, four references in the field and are subject to a criminal background check. "Caregivers become part of the family of our elderly customers," explains Reneau, "we recruit helpers who have chosen to work with seniors because they love it."

It's that commitment that has pleased the Edwards. According to the Lee Edwards, "Kevin has proposed caregivers who get along well with my parents; he followed up with visits and phone calls. His company showed involvement and care."

The Edwards signed up for help 10 hours a day, 7 days a week and two persons have been selected. Typically, contracts demand 3 to 4 hours a day, 3 to 5 times a week. The cost depends on the nature of the needs, and is usually around \$20 an hour. Such expenses are not usually covered by health insurance, but long term care insurance can help.

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