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Couple helps seniors through Home Helpers program

West suburban senior citizens are finding that their desires and needs are increasingly being met through the efforts of various organizations and services providers in their community. Working hard to improve the quality of life and independence of area seniors are Mike and Mary Doepke.

The Western Springs couple own and operate Home Helpers, an in-home provider of non-medical care for older adults. Because of the services offered by Home Helpers, seniors are able to maintain independence and remain safely in their homes.

Mike Doepke is also the leader of the Western Springs/Indian Head Park community action team of Aging Well. This is a grassroots volunteer initiative operated by AgeOptions, formerly known as Suburban Area Agency on Aging in Oak Park. The mission of Aging Well is to create elder-friendly communities through the work of community action teams made up of older adult volunteers and representatives from area businesses and community organizations. The community action teams help to identify the needs of seniors in the area and work to implement changes that will meet those needs.

The Doepkes opened Home Helpers a year and a half ago, wanting to work in a growing and rewarding industry. Mary, who is a nurse and serves as president of Home Helpers, "is responsible for hiring caregivers, meeting with clients, developing client care plans and matching caregivers with clients. Because of her background she has great aptitude for this," Mike Doepke said. He handles the business/marketing side of the business.

Mike said Home Helpers is clearly and by design, a 24/7 business. "We can't close the door at night and go home and relax. We have caregivers working 24 hours a day and if something comes up in the middle of the night, the first call is to us," he said.

Home Helpers provides a variety of services including errand running, transportation, companionship and assistance with personal care. Mike said that great attention is given to making the best possible match between caregiver and clients.

Often, Mike said, it is the child of the prospective client who calls, inquiring

Tower Town Topics

also serving
Indian Head
Park

Wendy
Foster



about Home Helpers. The prospective client could be very active and energetic and like to get out of the house but perhaps shouldn't be driving. Other clients may just need assistance bathing. "The neat thing about our company is that we'll

work one hour a week, to 24 hours a day," he said. "We never have a contract. The client calls and says how many hours they want and we adjust accordingly. We never make people commit."

To date, Home Helpers employs about 50 caregivers and, Mike said, "We interview every week." He said that while many of the employees have nursing background and/or degrees, "about 40 percent are just caring people who have raised families or cared for loved ones or have care giving experience. Most important is that they're caring and reliable."

Mike said he became involved with Aging Well because, "I wanted to understand the issues in the senior market. I want to understand what people are interested in and this makes me well-prepared to work in the world of the seniors."

Currently the Western Springs/Indian Head Park community action team of Aging Well provides informational presentations on topics pertinent to seniors. The community action team has also worked on a File of Life program, which helps ensure that first responders have easy access to current and accurate medical information.

"The objectives of Aging Well are terrific and the more involved I get, the more I can see the need for the initiative. They have momentum going with great goals and great people to support them," he concluded.

Western Springs/Indian Head Park community action team hosts presentations at 1 p.m. on the third Monday of each month at the Western Springs Recreation Center. On July 17, they will present a discussion on mental health issues for older adults by Jeri Aiello of Community Care Options. On Aug. 21, there will be a presentation about identity theft by John Paulin of Citibank. All presentations are free to the public.

For more information on Home Helpers, call (708) 783-1220 or visit www.homehelpers.cc. For further information on Aging Well visit www.s3a.com.