

BUSINESS PROFILE

Couple finds new career providing help for seniors, new moms and more

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STAFF WRITER

When Western Springs resident Mary Doepke returned home last winter from helping her father recover from a stroke, she thought her life would soon be back to normal. Little did this former stay-at-home mom know it would never be the same.

"I came home and my husband said 'This is what we should be doing,'" said Doepke, now co-owner of a local franchise of Home Helpers, a nationwide business that provides care, supervision and companionship to those in need.

Mike Doepke thought Home Helpers would be a perfect fit for his wife, a registered nurse, and himself, a veteran of the marketing field. One year later, it appears he was right.

"We love it," said Mary, who oversees 40 caregivers who look after the business' growing number of clients. They provide the kind of care she provided for her father, plus just about anything non-medical that a client needs to have done.

With the help of several Home Helpers working day and night, George Hoettinger's father got back on his feet after a two-month hospital stay. The assistants from Home Helpers not only helped his father get around the house and care for himself, they made life easier for Hoettinger's mother, himself and his siblings.

"Initially, you have a lot of concerns," Hoettinger said of



Mary Doepke meets with Michelle Scott, an employee of Home Helpers, about the needs of a client she'll soon meet. Doepke said hiring the right people and carefully matching those people to the right customers is the key to her business' success. (Doings photo by Steve Johnston)

the decision to bring someone in to care for a parent. But his concerns were soon put to rest, especially after meeting each of the caregivers as well as Mary.

Every new customer meets not only with Mary, but with the person or persons who will administer care. They are assured that each caregiver has been interviewed extensively and has undergone a thorough background check.

"We're very careful about who we hire as caregivers. I'm looking for compassionate, reliable, kind people," Mary said. "So much of the success of the business is matching

the caregiver with the client."

She not only matches a caregiver to a client's needs, but also to that person's personality. The result, she said, is often a bond that goes far deeper than a typical caregiver/client relationship.

Hoettinger said if and when the need for help occurs again, he'll call on Home Helpers. At \$18 to \$25 an hour for 24-hour care, it's an affordable option, Hoettinger said.

"I'll always go back to them," he said.

Seniors account for a majority of Home Helpers' clients, but the company's caregivers also are able to

help people recovering from an illness, surgery or accident, and new mothers dealing with the challenges of keeping house while caring for a new baby. Home Helpers recently received a call for assistance from a single father who needs help with his children while he undergoes chemotherapy.

Home Helpers can do the laundry or go to the grocery store while a new mom cares for her baby, or they can serve as a companion for someone who would rather not be alone. They can even provide transportation, take out the garbage or take a client out

for a little entertainment or fresh air.

"We can do just about anything," Mary said, although medical care is not provided. Personal care, such as bathing, is conducted by a certified nursing assistant.

Her background in nursing comes to use, whether a caregiver has a question about a client or the clients have concerns themselves.

"My cell phone is always on," said Mary, who has gone out more than once in the middle of the night to listen to a cough. "It rings in the middle of the night, and we're there."

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