



Business:

Surviving the recession: Finding joy — and profits — in helping others Couple's business provides affordable care to elderly at home

By Buck Wargo

The recession hasn't kept a former bank executive and his wife from investing in the health care business. Their story — successful so far, in not letting the economy get in the way of ambitious goals — offers a slice of good news from the otherwise reeling business community.

The couple, Michael and Jackie DiAsio, were approached about a year ago about taking over Visiting Angels of Henderson by the owners, Steve and Bonnie Robbins. The couple had started the business 10 years ago and wanted to retire.

Jackie DiAsio had worked five years as the company's operations manager and her husband, Michael, was a former executive with Wells Fargo and Southwest-USA banks. Michael DiAsio said he knew the challenges of the economy, the projections that any rebound would take time and how it would be a grind every day until it does.

But those concerns were offset, he said, by the career shift, which he said was exhilarating for its whole new set of challenges and rewards, ones that his wife had already experienced by working for the company.

The appreciation of seniors and people with disabilities and their families for providing the in-home care was much different from the daily grind of the banking world, he found.

The company provides nonhealth care related services, from two to 24 hours a day depending on a person's needs, including help with personal hygiene, eating and walking. The company also provides housekeeping and transportation services and companionship, and provides care when family members need a respite.

What's been key to helping the business grow during the recession? Offering services for as few as two hours a day, compared with the minimum of three or four hours typically demanded by other in-home providers, DiAsio said.

Business is up 30 percent in billable hours since the couple took over in January, and 30 employees have been added to a field staff of 150, he said. The company has seven employees in its office.

The Henderson company opened a satellite office in Summerlin in April that is expected to grow as the economy improves, DiAsio said. Visiting Angels sees about 300 people a day.

"Part of the success we have had during this economy that helped us grow is our flexibility," DiAsio said. "We thought



Visiting Angels Co-owner Jacqueline DiAsio (in chair) and employees (from left) Shantia Floyd, Cheryl Ariola, Jan Bowers, and Alisa Pannisse, simulate using the Hoyer, a lift for bed bound clients.

with the economy that two hours would fit people's budgets better. They may require four, but can't afford four, or they simply don't need four hours."

The service costs \$20 an hour, and less if it is based on a longer stay in the home. Some want service provided for two-hour stretches four times a day to help with meals and other needs, he said.

About half of the business is through Medicaid, other government-funded programs or through nonprofit organizations that outsource care for people, DiAsio said.

The other half of the business is from private pay-clients, of which about 10 to 15 percent have long-term care policies that pay for services, he said. Medicaid has cut the hours of in-home care that can be provided, so that has been another challenge to overcome, DiAsio said.

Jackie DiAsio said the company has dealt with the challenges by working harder. The company responds within an hour of requests for service to do an assessment and get the in-home care started as quickly as possible, she said.

"It would be great if the economy would help out, but we are not counting on that," Michael DiAsio said. "We are going to keep spreading the word and doing what we are doing and try to set ourselves apart. That will pay off in the end and one day the economy will come back. That will make it much easier."