

# Childhood influence leads local woman to ‘Solutions’



BEVERLY REVIEW

## Home Companion Solutions

Ann Weist, Steve Golden, Penny Golden and Carrie Rasor comprise Home Companion Solutions, a local business that provides non-medical companions to clients in the Beverly/Morgan Park and Mt. Greenwood communities and surrounding southwest suburbs. The business offers care that ranges from live-in service to hourly companion service for care that is needed more infrequently. (Review photo)

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by Caroline Connors

Penny Golden’s affinity for older people began when she was just a kid joining her father at his weekly lunch dates with the older gentlemen of the Optimists Club in Youngstown, Ohio.

As she matured, her compassion for the elderly was manifested in a career as a registered nurse that included experience as a geriatric psychiatric nurse at two Chicago hospitals.

Now a married mom of four living in Beverly, Golden is using her interest and skills to help older people live independently in their homes. Together with her husband, Steve Golden, and their business partner, Ann Weist, Golden founded Home Companions Solutions, a local business that provides non-medical personnel for live-in care or hourly companion service to clients in Beverly/Morgan Park and neighboring southwest suburban communities.

The business, located in a second-floor suite at 10829 S. Western Ave., is a division of The Nurse Agency, a supplemental staffing agency for healthcare providers that the Golden and Weist have run since 2001. Golden is the president of both companies and, for the past three years, has also been working as a part-time nurse care manager for another home-care business.

“Geriatric nursing is my love,” she said, “and I took the position because I missed the interaction I had with my patients at [Rush University Medical Center].”

Home Companion Solutions was created not only to satisfy Golden’s personal interest in direct patient geriatric care, she said, but to also fill a void in the market.

“We were getting calls to The Nurse Agency all the time from people looking for in-home companions,” she said. “We realized there was a great need for these types of services.”

According to Golden, there are a lot of people who don’t want to leave their homes but may need assistance with day-to-day activities like grocery shopping, light housekeeping and personal care. Companions can also run errands, pay bills and provide conversation and comfort for their clients.

In essence, Golden said, companions do whatever a family member would do for a loved one whose life is affected by illness, dementia or age when there is no family available or when relatives need respite from caregiving.

And sometimes, Golden said, even if there are family members present, neither they nor the patient know the type of care that is needed. That’s where she steps in.

“You need someone to talk turkey,” she said. “It’s nice to have a professional who’s not a relative to talk about the hard stuff.”

During a consultation, Golden meets the patient, assesses his or her living arrangement and evaluates the level of care that is needed. She then plays matchmaker, choosing a companion that will match the client’s needs and personality.

“Some people might be looking for a lot of conversation, while others might just want someone to kind of stay in the background,” she said. “We want the patients to be comfortable and to give their families peace of mind.”

Golden said she believes in the mission of Home Companion Solutions, which aims to assist its clients in leading “dignified and independent lives in the comfort and safety of their homes.”

“I think older people should be revered,” she said, “and I feel they should have the chance to do the end of life on their own terms.”

Helping them remain safe and secure in the process is a job that she's honored to have.

"I'm put in the roles I'm put in for a reason, and I believe we're definitely making a difference for a few people," she said. "A relative of one of my clients said to me, 'You helped her live until she died.' That means a lot to me."