

Senior care business celebrates 15 years

By Evan Case
Of The Chronicle

"It started with almost nothing."

Fifteen years ago Aimee Stewart and Sheila Saunders, two Allentown-based sisters originally from the Philadelphia area, opened their South Fulton Street business, Senior Solutions.

"As far as space goes, we had this one room upstairs," said Stewart. "It started out with just the two of us and one client that Sheila had brought with her from a public agency."

From one client and two sisters, the business has grown to nearly 75 ongoing clients, a dozen professional staff members and more than 80 caregivers. Stewart and Saunders believe that a major reason for their success is that they fit a niche that had not existed in the Lehigh Valley before they came – that of a private geriatric counseling and care agency.

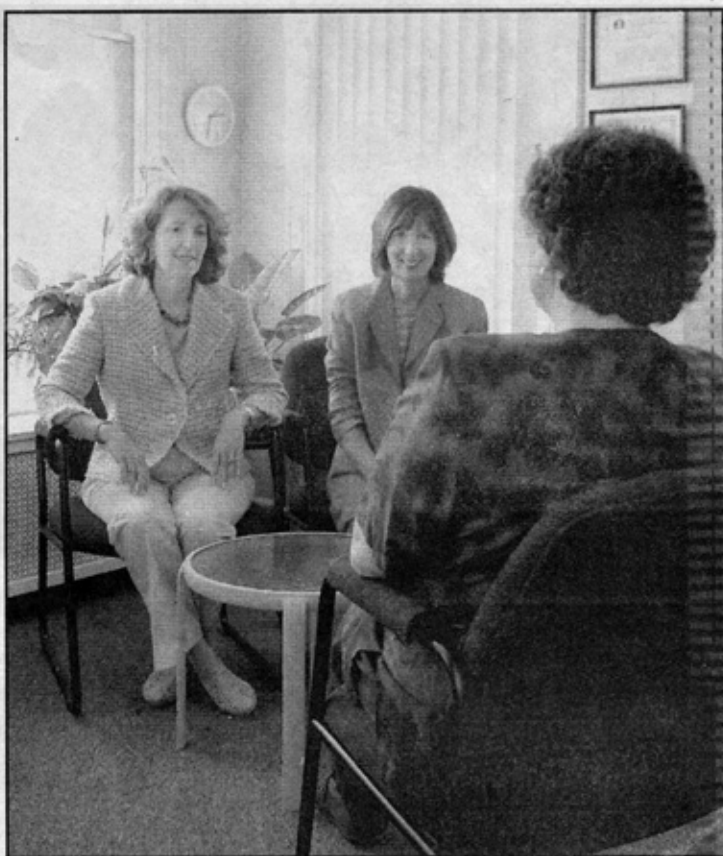
"It's a relatively new profession," said Saunders. "The care is very complicated today, insurance is complicated and the entitlement programs are complicated."

The primary goal of their business is to consult with their elderly clients – or their family members – and create both short and long term plans to deal with their eventual medical, financial, housing and social needs.

"There are still many public agencies out there," said Stewart, "but just as people do not want to go necessarily to legal aid – they want a private attorney – they want a private care manager as well."

The idea was primarily that of Saunders, who had previously been president of the Philadelphia chapter of Professional Geriatric Care Managers. Stewart, whose background was in business, proved an asset both in running the company and organizing family care.

They both agree that the two most common types of clients they see are those who have begun losing their memory capacity or those who have experienced a crisis resulting in hospitalization, such as stroke or a fracture caused by a fall.



Evan Case of The Chronicle

Sisters Sheila Saunders, left, and Aimee Stewart meet with a client at their Senior Solutions office, located on South Fulton Street. The business, which celebrated its 15th anniversary last month, helps the elderly and their families.

"Some days we feel like we've seen it all and then something new comes," said Stewart. "Every day is different. Every family has different issues and different dynamics."

"We do a lot of in-home consultations," said Saunders. "We don't really ever want to see anybody all dressed up."

"Plus," added Stewart, "if they come to our office we have no clue how they're really living. If we go to their house, we see if the refrigerator's empty or if the place has a lot of steps and they haven't been upstairs to take a shower in a long time. That's all very telling."

Since a major part of their job is to stay informed about the best hospitals or elderly care facilities in the area (to say nothing of the travel time in the event of a client emergency), the sisters have kept Senior Solutions almost entirely based within the Lehigh Valley.

"We feel we do the best job that way," said Saunders. "We know all the facilities in this area. We don't want to give advice about a facility in an area we have very little

knowledge about. There's a constant education here."

In 1992, the business spawned Caring Companions, a program intended to provide non-medical care to people at a reasonable rate. The caregivers involved go to a client's home, where they can do the laundry, cook meals, clean up, or simply provide companionship.

"Sometimes, that's all someone needs to stay in their home," said Saunders.

The company's motto, "We Do Well By Doing Good," is one that Saunders and Stewart genuinely believe.

"Every day, we go home feeling that we've helped someone to have a better quality of life," said Stewart. "Some clients have never really had a family. We find we really become that surrogate family for them. We have a real super staff. We couldn't do it without them."

For additional information about Senior Solutions, call 610-435-6677 or visit www.senior-solutions.com.

ecase@chroniclesmc.com
484-232-6806