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A near tragedy for one Northland family was the genesis of helping hands for a lot of other families.

In 2008, Jim and Susan Van Hooser opened their BrightStar Healthcare franchise in Kansas City North to provide a spectrum of around-the-clock, home-based services throughout Greater Kansas City.

But the real moment of conception for the business was on Sept. 3, 1998, Susan Van Hooser said. That's when the couple learned that their 3-year-old son, Cody, had acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

While Cody dealt with three years of chemotherapy, the Van Hoosers were also trying to balance caring for their older son, Shane, and their own full-time careers. Out of that experience was born a determination to help people who are caring for sick, elderly or disabled loved ones, Susan Van Hooser said.

"When someone you love is ill, it changes your perspective," she said. "Jim and I knew we wanted, in some way, to give back. We just didn't know the best way."

The way became clearer in 2007, when Illinois-based BrightStar Healthcare asked the Van Hoosers to consider opening a branch in Kansas City.

With their personal experiences and Jim Van Hooser's work in the pharmaceutical industry, the company seemed like a natural fit. They particularly liked the fact that it helped alleviate stress for families trying to care for loved ones, Susan Van Hooser said.

"We knew what it felt like not knowing who to turn to for help," she said.

BrightStar Healthcare provides services in three main categories: companion care, personal care and activities, the Van Hooser's said.

Companion care can include providing support for expectant mothers, respite and family relief services, and baby-sitting for busy, working parents.

Services provided under personal care include bathing and feeding loved ones, medication reminders, and outpatient pre- and post-operative assistance.

Finally, the Van Hooser's staff of thoroughly vetted, highly-qualified staff can do things like create grocery lists customized for dietary needs and personal preferences; assist with art projects and reading; or plan visits, outings and trips.

The two main keys to BrightStar Healthcare, according to the Van Hoosers, is the time they spend to identify and serve the unique needs of each client, and the fact that their services are available 24-hours a day, everyday.

"If there's a need, we're going to figure out how to serve it," Jim Van Hooser said.

Jim and Susan Van Hooser have both spent their entire lives in the Northland. That's one of the main reasons why they decided to open the franchise in Kansas City North.

"We wanted to be here because we knew people here," Susan Van Hooser said. "This was our community and we wanted to serve it."

THE DETAILS

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MARK JOHNSON/Liberty Tribune
Janice McCann, a caregiver for BrightStar Healthcare, visits with Jack Urie, one of the company's clients at the Riverstone Retirement Community in Kansas City North.

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