



Family experience inspires new business

By Carol Sorgen

When Lynn Berberich was casting about for a career change last year, she didn't have to look far to realize where her passion lies.

Berberich's grandmother, now 107 years old, lived independently until she was 95. Berberich's father, who is 90, still lives in his own home. And Berberich's brother, though he died when he was still in his 30s, was able to remain at home with his wife and children because of in-home hospice care.

"I'm committed to helping those who want to remain in their own home [as they age]," said Berberich, explaining her decision to open BrightStar Care, a service company that provides home services from companion care to skilled nursing.

"I have a passion to help people age in place," said the 58-year-old Phoenix, Md., resident.

Learning to be an entrepreneur

Berberich's career has taken many turns through the years. She began as a social worker, received a master's degree in education and worked in Australia for six years, then returned to the United States where she joined the corporate world.

She spent 30 years climbing the professional ladder at PHH Corporation in Hunt Valley. When her position was eliminated a year ago, Berberich quickly realized that both the weakened economy and her age didn't bode well for her finding a job at the same career and income level she had enjoyed at PHH.

"I didn't think there were going to be a lot of jobs open to me," said Berberich. Not one to sit and fret, she said, she took advantage of the outplacement services offered those who were laid off and began exploring other career options.

"I'm a lifelong learner," Berberich said, so she threw herself into every program and class available.

"Somehow I wound up taking a series of classes in entrepreneurship," she recalled. "That's not something I ever thought about. But from what I was learning, it seemed that both my personality and skills were ideally suited to being my own boss." Next Berberich needed to identify an area that would match those skills as well as have earning potential. When she started researching business opportunities, with the assistance of a consultant, she realized that she wanted to work with seniors in the home care industry.

Berberich opened a BrightStar franchise last November and is now offering home care services to seniors and other homebound individuals throughout Baltimore City and County.

"I'm already ahead of my business plan," she said proudly. But more importantly, she added, "I just love

coming to work. There's so much more meaning in my days."

BrightStar employs about 30 people, including Susan Stokes, Berberich's branch/office manager, who is also over 50 and was laid off from her position as a human resources manager.

"She took a risk in coming to work for me, but also recognized that this was a great opportunity to do something new," said Berberich.

Finding funding

Changing careers is never easy, and Berberich faced a few challenges, especially when it came to getting financing for the business. After obtaining counseling from the Small Business Administration, Berberich approached her bank for a small business loan. She was told that she had to have two years' experience in the industry in which she wanted a loan — in this case home care.

"I didn't have it," said Berberich. But what she did have was the ability to put together a plan that identified how the skills she already possessed meshed with the skills needed in her new career, and how she planned to fill in any knowledge gaps.

She got the loan, and now counsels others in the same position not to be afraid to take a chance. "Do your research and have a plan," she said.

Though Berberich misses her friends from her previous job, and though she now works seven days a week ("there's not much leisure time," she laughed), she said that she has made many new friends and enjoys knowing that she's making a difference in people's lives.

"When a client's husband calls our caregiver a 'miracle,' allowing his wife to die in dignity, or when a woman calls to thank us for taking the time to make both her and her aging mother feel special, it means a lot," said Berberich.

"There is a lot of joy in what I'm doing now," she continued. "I wish I had done this sooner."



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