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Husband and wife team up for health care business

BY ROSE SGARLATO

SPARTA — After both working for 20 years in the airline industry, husband and wife team Bob and Jan Bongiorno decided it was time for a new partnership: a business together. Last November, they opened BrightStar Care in Sparta, a home health care and medical staffing agency.

"We were tired of corporations and always wanted to work together," Jan Bongiorno said. They are both avid readers who thought about opening a bookstore. But a year ago, they went to a franchise broker who introduced them to BrightStar, a full-service health care agency that provides medical and non-medical home care to private clients in their homes, as well as staff to corporate clients.

"It appealed to us because we wanted to do work that gave back to the community. We first got our home health care license and then opened this past November," Bob Bongiorno said.

"Bob's dad died of cancer in 1992 and mine in 1996. Seeing our fathers go through different medical care and the problems that arose and the toll that it took on families and caregivers made us want to do this," said Jan Bongiorno.

All BrightStar employees receive a background check and are drug tested in addition to meeting many requirements before getting hired. The agency is staffed with a director of nursing that offers assessments and a custom care plan. "We pay for training courses if necessary. We have from caregivers who are home health aides to skilled registered nurses. We are basically an agency that matches the people to the jobs - our service can be as simple as a companion taking someone to the hairdresser," Bob Bongiorno said. Their clients mostly range from 24 to 84 years of age and sometimes even younger; one employee is currently taking care of triplets for two working parents.

The Bongornos' sharp business acumen derives from years of holding management positions for American Airlines, United Airlines and more recently ADP in Roseland, New Jersey. "We are trying to run this as a high quality operation. Jan does the sales effort by going to medical offices and getting referrals. I run the office and take care of all the numbers and business," Bob said. "Nothing is recession-proof, but this is recession resistant."

Caretaking seems to be in this couple's blood. About three years ago the Bongornos, who already had two children adopted from Bulgaria and five dogs, decided



they wanted to foster a family. Through the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), they first fostered a brother and sister and recently had three children living with them who are now placed in a permanent home.

"We have an affinity for kids. We wanted siblings because they are hard to place and keep together," Jan said. "You get a call which is an emergency situation and 20 minutes later, the kids are here," added Bob. The 24/7 attention that goes to the children also applies to their business. "It never really closes. Through technology we are always connected and available to get calls all the time," he said.

"It's satisfying all the way around. We help quality people get jobs. We help the elderly and those in need."

BrightStar Care is located at 25 Main Street in Sparta. Call 973-729-3213.