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Aging population creates new jobs

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Because they are living longer and because, statistically, there are not enough younger family members to take care of them, baby boomers are sparking a sector of economic growth with vast job opportunities.

According to the Administration on Aging, there were 38.9 million Americans 65 or older in 2008, the latest year that data is available. That represented 12.8 percent of the country's population, or about one in every eight Americans.

By 2030, the number of Americans 65 or older is projected to be 72.1 million.

As a result, private and franchise companies such as Caring Transitions, Comfort Keepers, and BrightStar are beginning to dot suburban landscapes.

These facilities are designed to meet the needs of the elderly whether it be nutritional, transitional, physical or financial. They offer a wide variety of services to meet just about any need, including providing private duty home care as well as health care staffing to corporate clients.

Dolly Wittman became a personal caregiver to a friend who was diagnosed with cancer and later died. She said she realized the emotional pain family members and friends go through and the stress they take on when packing up household

items and preparing to sell a house.

As a result, she opened a Caring Transitions franchise in Lenexa more than a year ago. She said the company specializes in senior moving, downsizing and estate sales and provides a "total" solution for families facing difficult situations.

"We do whatever a family needs us to do," she said. "We're a senior-based company and probably 75 to 80 percent of my clients are in the senior market, but I have two consultations with people in their 50s who have five-bedroom homes and don't want to live there anymore."

"There is no such thing as a normal client; we've done everything from de-cluttering homes to helping a lady to just pack because she was going to be foreclosed on but didn't have enough time to do a sale, to doing a straight estate sale because someone has passed."

"Right now we're helping a lady in her 90s move from Kansas City to Connecticut where all her sons and grandchildren live."

Because Caring Transitions is a national company, Wittman said once they get the lady to Connecticut, the Caring Transitions office there will take over to help her unpack and settle in to her new residence.

She said her staff of six helps families cope with the difficult housing market by assessing the items in the house and by assisting them in making critical decisions about those items.

She said her business is licensed, insured and all of her employees are bonded, which sets her company apart from some others.

"That totally separates us," she said. "There are a lot of companies that do bits and pieces of what we do; there's just nobody else that can do the entire package."

Wittman said her company charges from \$15 to \$35 an hour depending on the situation and for estate sales charges 30 percent of the total profit.

"I have a little flexibility and try to work with people, but I tell people that I'm not a mom-and-pop business and I can't do things as cheaply as some companies because they are not insured or their employees aren't bonded," she said. "I want to protect me, my company, my employees as well as my clients because this is their stuff we're dealing with."

Dr. Tyghe Nielson worked in a clinic and an emergency room and became frustrated witnessing the gaps of the health care system. As a result, he teamed with BrightStar and opened his franchise this past February in Overland Park.

BrightStar is a full-service health care staffing agency that specializes in providing medical and non-medical private duty home care and health care staffing to corporate clients.

While senior citizens make up the majority of the company's private duty clientele, BrightStar also works with high-tech pediatric and workers' compensation cases, long-term care and veteran clients as well as private trust and public guardian payers.

His staff tries to improve its clients' quality of life, maintain their dignity and relieve the stress that their families face on a day-to-day basis.

"We are intimately involved with the families we serve and support our clients and staff with every means possible," Nielson said. "We are people who care about people. Our mission is to give peace of mind to our clients by providing the highest quality health care staffing solutions to families and businesses."

Nielson said his facility will bring between 50 and 100 new part-time and full-time jobs to Overland Park.