

Millersville family finds good fortune in search for in-home geriatric care

When Debbie Kraft brought her mother-in-law home from the hospital in late April 2004, she and her husband quickly found that they needed help caring for her.

"I couldn't help her get out of the hospital bed to get to the bathroom," said Mrs. Kraft. "When I tried to do it, I hurt my back for two weeks."

Eighty-two-year-old Henrietta Kraft was discharged in the evening after two weeks of hospital recuperation for a heart bypass operation. The Krafts knew they needed non-medical help after receiving conflicting advice from the hospital. Desperately flipping through the Yellow Pages, Debbie Kraft called geriatric health care companies, only to find that many were closed for the day.

"We had to grab whoever we could," Mrs. Kraft said.

She found that some Baltimore-based health care companies would charge a travel fee and a contract fee to send a care provider from the city.

"I had a lot of questions," Mrs. Kraft said. "They were probably sick of me," she said of the companies she called during the next few days.

"I wanted to make sure my mother-in-law was taken care of," Mrs. Kraft said. She wanted good service at a reasonable price with the flexibility to stay for days or weeks.

Debbie Kraft happened upon the phone number for the Annapolis office of Options for Senior America Corp., who sent a care provider for that night to help the elder Mrs. Kraft, who lives in an apartment behind the Kraft's Millersville home, go to the bathroom three or four times at night.

Options for Senior America has

beeper services that allow those who want to contract the company in emergencies to contact them. During the 12-hour stay, the attendant also dressed Henrietta Kraft in the morning before heading out for her day job.

The next night, Options for Senior America sent a different care provider, a woman from the Eastern Shore named Rosemarie. Working for \$15.75 an hour, she proved her worth many times over to the Krafts. They knew they had a keeper.

Not only did Rosemarie help the elderly woman get to the bathroom, she washed Henrietta Kraft and dressed her. She also washed her soiled underwear by hand if necessary. She fixed breakfast and cleaned the dishes in the morning, emptied the trash, took Mrs. Kraft's temperature, gave her medicine and

took her for a walk. The lengths of the walks would increase over time, as Mrs. Kraft recovered from the heart surgery.

Rosemarie stayed busy during each 12-hour visit to the apartment.

"We didn't have to do anything when she was here," Debbie Kraft said.

The family asked Options for Senior America to continue sending her back. In time, a two-week stay turned into a six-week stay, before Henrietta Kraft could sit up on her own and did not need Rosemarie's help.

During her research of care providers and brief experience with three of them who had cared for her mother-in-law before Rosemarie, Mrs. Kraft found that many have day jobs and watch television and then go to

sleep in the client's residence after they put the client to bed.

"It seems to be par for the course," Kraft said, "except for Rosemarie. I was amazed."

When Mrs. Kraft would look out her window over to her mother-in-law's apartment in the middle of the night, she would always see a light on. "It was as though Rosemarie were keeping a vigil, like a faithful soldier protecting a country's boundaries. She'd be sitting in a chair in the living room, ironing clothes," Mrs. Kraft said.

Options for Senior America is based in Silver Spring and has been in business for 15 years.

— Bill Murray

billm@developassociates.com