

# Goodyear couple provides non-medical in-home care

by **Elias C. Arnold** - Jul. 11, 2009 07:00 AM  
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A Goodyear couple whose aging parents suddenly needed special care is trying to make that experience easier for others.

Steve Kramer moved to the Valley for work in 2001. Two weeks later, his then- 67-year-old mother was injured in a car accident back home in Michigan and required nearly a year of in-home care to recover.

A few months later, Christie Kramer found herself having to choose whether to follow her husband to Arizona or stay in Michigan to care for her then 69-year-old father. He had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Christie said the experience made them recognize their own mortality and the importance of building a "team" to care for older adults and their family members.

"We weren't meant to live in isolation and do it all ourselves," she said. "It takes a team."

Four years later, in 2005, the Kramers opened Blessings! For Seniors Companion Care, which provides non-medical in-home care. The company provides services that don't require licenses, such as meal preparation, transportation, and paying bills.

The couple ran the business out of their home until early this year when they moved into offices west of Estrella Parkway and Roosevelt Street. In May, they opened the Southwest Resource Center, a free service to help those caring for an aging parent.

"It's more than a place, it's really a support system for families" caring for older adults, Christie said.

Center staff can help explain who qualifies for Medicare and Arizona's version of Medicaid. They also offer classes on care-giving, end-of-life planning and senior issues and provide speakers for groups on topics such as preventing falls and community agencies.

"That's our ultimate goal, just to provide the information so people can plan ahead and make a decision before a crisis," Christie said.

Chip Yarger's mother, Margaret, was a Blessings! client for nearly two years before she died in March at age 87. Today, the company cares for Chip's 86-year-old father, Jack.

"It has meant the world," Yarger said. "(Their care) has been the one big concern that we've had over . . . the last two to three years."

Jack and Margaret Yarger grew up in the Litchfield Park area and met in seventh grade. They later married and moved to Ohio, but always wanted to return to Arizona. They finally came back in 1996.

In 2007, Chip tried moving his parents near his home in Colorado. But they were back in the Valley within a few months. That's when someone put them in touch with Blessings!

The company gave Chip peace of mind and allowed Jack to help care for Margaret as long as possible.

Blessings! caregiver Sandy Warner has gone out of her way to help the Yargers. She helped throw a 65th wedding anniversary celebration for the couple and had Jack stay in her home when his air-conditioning broke.

"It's like (Warner's) family has almost adopted my dad," Chip said.

Steve Kramer called Warner's work the "core" of their business. They want to be known as a company with heart and for clients to feel like staff is their extended family.

"Whether they use us or not, if we can help somebody relieve the stress of family care-giving, that's part of our mission," he said.