



## BrightStar Lifecare franchise helps families care for their senior loved ones

BY GREG GARDNER

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Aug 21, 2011|

Last summer, Anne Marie Gattari and her sisters were looking for some help taking care of their recently widowed mother, Anna Biondo, who was living alone in Clinton Township.

Within less than a year, that pursuit led to a change in Gattari's career path. She took an early-retirement buyout earlier this year from her job as a corporate communications manager at Ford to start a franchise of BrightStar Lifecare, an Illinois-based provider of elder care, child care and medical staffing for individuals, families and health care facilities.

"The more I got involved with finding the best care for my mother, the more I began to think, 'Hey, maybe I can do this,'" said Gattari, whose territory covers Clinton Township and the Grosse Pointes.

She now has Michigan's fourth BrightStar franchise. Keith and Cathy Angelocci are

based in Novi, Kelvyn and Sarah Williams work from Brighton, and John and Sharon Zimmerman cover most of northern Michigan from Traverse City.

BrightStar was founded in 2002 by J.D. and Shelly Sun, a young couple in suburban Chicago who had been caring for a grandparent from a distance. They signed their first franchise agreement in 2005, and since then the business has grown to about 230 franchises throughout the U.S.

Each franchisee pays a fee of \$47,500 for the first 200,000 in population in his or her designated territory. Beyond 250,000 in population, the franchisee pays an additional \$200 for each additional 1,000 in population.

Though each franchise can offer child care and health care staffing to other providers, about 75% of the company's work is focused on senior care, Gattari estimates. BrightStar works with franchise brokers to find people considered appropriate to represent the business. Gattari began a

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discovery period in March, a type of get-acquainted/extended job interview, during which both parties decide whether they are a good fit for each other.

"My first task was to hire a director of nursing," Gattari said. "We held a job fair in July where we had about 150 applicants for the position of certified nurse assistants."

So far, she has hired nine nurse assistants and plans to add 12 to 16 more.

To recruit clients, Gattari has talked to community groups, shown up at events such as a recent summit on caring for the elderly at Lakeview High School in St. Clair Shores and bought a sponsorship with the Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology.

Once a family is interested, the franchisee and director of nursing conducts an assessment with the person to receive care and his or her family.

"Then we determine the appropriate plan of care," Gattari said. The less intensive option is called companion care, which involves helping with laundry, light housekeeping, meal planning and cooking, or just relieving family members.

For those who need more, there is direct medical care, which can range from bathing and grooming, home **safety** evaluations to prevent unnecessary accidents, outpatient pre- and post-operation support and medication reminders. Each office can also provide

live-in specialized care for such needs as blood-sugar testing, physical therapy and hospice assistance.

All nursing assistants are bonded and insured. They also undergo comprehensive reference checks and drug screening.

The rate for companion care is about \$18 an hour, while medical care is about \$23 an hour. Live-in care starts at \$200 per day, Gattari said.

Medicare does not pay for this type of care, according to the company's Web site, but many long-term care insurance policies will.

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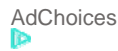
### BrightStar Lifecare franchise

Franchise owner: Anne Marie Gattari

Location : 23550 Harper Ave., Suite 110, St. Clair Shores

Number of employees : 10

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