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Cleaning for a Cause

Maid Service Helps Cancer Patients Undergoing Treatment

By Cécile Satin
Staff Writer

Fighting cancer is tough enough, but living with cancer is even tougher.

Deborah Sardone, founder of the Cleaning For a Reason Foundation, helps cancer patients get back on their feet by doing their house cleaning while they undergo treatment.

"The idea is old but the foundation is new," Sardone said. "We have been doing this for years. We have had a hard time turning down a woman who needs her house cleaned when she is battling cancer and cannot afford a maid service. I decided to go ahead and form a foundation so that it could go beyond Lewisville. Why not do this all over the country?"

Started in concept more than a year ago, Sardone recently introduced her idea in an article published in an industry magazine for the Association of Residential Cleaning Services International. Encouraged by community members and peers' positive feedback, she incorporated Cleaning For a Reason as a nonprofit corporation last May. It is now awaiting approval of its tax-exempt status.

This past October, Sardone introduced her foundation at an ARCSI conference in Chicago.

"Many maid service owners came up to me and said they loved this service," Sardone said. "We asked for help, and 22 businesses signed to be monthly supporters. They really embraced the idea completely. These people have a heart of gold ... We also shared several ideas for them to be able to help women for free without it overtaking their business."

Even though Sardone says they are learning as they go, they hope to raise up to \$5,000 this year for the foundation and sign up 10 additional sponsors nationwide.

The foundation accepts donations, and all funds raised will go toward helping women and creating materials for the foundation's fundraising and promotional events.

"We are still at the local level, but I [have] already got requests from people around the country," Sardone said.

Most of the time, it is friends or family members who pool their finances to offer the patient a maid service gift certificate, Sardone said. However, Buckets and Bows, Sardone's for-profit company, continues helping patients as they go through the treatment once the gift certificate runs out.

For many cancer patients, the help they receive means more than just having a clean sparkling house from top to bottom. It is a way to get their life back on track.

"It is an amazing service to offer somebody, especially if they have younger children and are undergoing treatments and suffering from all the side effects," said Joan Floyd, former cancer patient and a Buckets and Bows regular customer. "The house is the last thing you really want to worry about. I wanted to keep on with my normal life and not let it consume me. Your life gets disrupted by the treatment ... Women should take advantage of this opportunity, so their focus can be on their family and not on their house."

Sardone said that the businesses who commit to monthly \$1,200 pledges become charter members, meaning that they become part of a network on which the foundation will rely for free cleaning help. Only maid services already signed up as a monthly contributor will be contacted to help, Sardone said.

"Let's say, for example, that I live here in Lewisville, but I have an aunt in Tucson, Ariz., who needs help, and I want to donate \$500 for her to get free cleaning," Sardone said. "If we have a charter member in that area, [they] will be the one we call and ask them if they can help her and how much cleaning would this \$500 donation buy."

Asked why this free service is mainly for women, Sardone said that 90 percent of the customers and owners of maid service businesses are women.

"My mother is a survivor of ovarian cancer, and I have had friends who died from it. So I have a soft spot for women who are fighting cancer," Sardona said.

The program starts and stops with the treatment to be economically sustainable for the businesses helping out.

"We do not qualify people financially, but we do ask for a doctor referral for the time of treatment," Sardone said.

The foundation's next main fundraising event will be a silent auction in early Spring.

For volunteer and donation information, see www.cleaningforareason.org or call 888-258-5540.

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