

Help for the sandwich generation

Naperville woman focuses on families caring for loved ones long-distance

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May 31, 2009

By **DAVID SHAROS** For The Sun

Some people who serve others here in Naperville give of their time; others, with money; and still others, with both. Cheryl Formento's kindness transcends all of these by giving something truly from the heart.

Formento, 39, who is married and a mother of three children, and her cousin Kathleen Benner are owners of a support business for those whose loved ones are hospitalized. The women developed the enterprise, supported by the online site www.hospitalcompanions.com, after experiencing some heart-wrenching moments with family members.



Cheryl Formento of Naperville, shown here at her office in Woodridge, is the vice president and co-owner of Hospital Companions. Formento's father, Dan Sutter, who passed away in 2005, was her inspiration for the new business co-owned with her cousin, Kathleen Brenner.
(Robyn Sheldon/For The Sun)



A photo of Cheryl Formento's father, Dan Sutter, who passed away in 2005, adorns the desktop of her office in Woodridge.
(Robyn Sheldon/For The Sun)

Nominate Up-and-Comers

Nominate someone in your community who has a fabulous career and finds time for community and family events. They should be someone between 21 and 40 who either lives or works in Naperville and most definitely will make a difference in the community now and in the future. Make sure to include their name, age, contact information and why you think they should be featured. E-mail nominations to readers' editor Heather Pfundstein at hpfundstein@scn1.com

"The first crisis involved my father, who passed away after a five-year fight with lung cancer," Formento said. "Our family lives here in Naperville, and my dad was living in South Carolina, so with three kids, it was a challenge to be here as their mother but also try to spend time

with my dad while he was ill. I'm his only child, and there was this feeling of guilt, regardless of whether I was here or there."

When another issue developed in 2007 related to a grandparent who passed away, Formento and her cousin vowed to create another way for others facing the same issues.

"We waited 45 minutes in the waiting room when my grandfather was in, and during a serious surgery, that amount of time can be an eternity," Formento said. "We didn't get word from anyone, and we later found out we were in the wrong waiting room the whole time. The doctor had been looking for us and couldn't figure out where we were."

How it works

Formento said that, according to the Family Caregiver Alliance, a not-for-profit group that supports family and friends by offering long-term care at home, 7 million Americans face the challenges of caring for loved ones from a distance.

Hospital Companions pairs a college-educated professional with family members, providing support and nonmedical assistance to the patient, according to a press release. Through their Web site, a customized patient page provides updates to family and friends about how their loved one is doing.

Formento said her business venture isn't about making money so much as it is about sparing others the grief and helplessness that comes from feeling the need to be two places at once.

"I lost my dad when he was 56, and his life was far too short," Formento said. "I feel like working with people during their time of need like this means that maybe something good came out of my father's passing."

Success story

One of her clients, Molly Williams of Naperville, said Formento's services were invaluable during a double knee replacement that William's mother recently experienced.

"I heard about the Hospital Companions service from a friend, and with six of us children scattered around the state, it was impossible to coordinate visits to my mom when she was in the hospital," Williams said. "We definitely are a part of this 'sandwich generation' where you have to worry about your parents as well as your children.

"Cheryl took over, keeping an eye on my mom and visiting her frequently. We were always kept in the loop."

To date, Formento said she has worked with about 20 to 30 clients and that her individual belief or mission for the company is to be "the supportive element for families."

"To me, the doctors and nurses are doing all that they can, but I really believe that the 'secondary support' is just as important as what the medical professionals do," she said. "Our service isn't just about sitting with people while they watch TV."