

2004 Women in Business Achievement Awards

Welcome to the Charlotte Business Journal's eighth annual Women in Business Achievement Awards.

In this report, we profile the 25 award winners for 2004. These are women who have made outstanding achievements in business in the Charlotte region during the past year.

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Roberta Farnum

Home Instead Senior Care of Charlotte

Title: Co-owner

In her words: "We want to make our services something people will embrace so they can remain independent for as long as possible."

Her story: In 2000, Roberta Farnum and her husband, Les, invested \$45,000 to open Home Instead Senior Care of Charlotte, a franchise operation that provides non-medical care to the elderly.

As one of the first companies in the area to focus solely on services such as meals, transportation, housekeeping, laundry and Alzheimer's care to seniors, Home Instead quickly established a strong market share.

The company capitalizes on the desire of many seniors to remain at home as long as possible, despite the challenges of age.

Today, the company has more than 125 employees. So far, Home Instead has served more than 600 clients in Mecklenburg County, some requiring round-the-clock care. The company charges \$14 to \$16 per hour for its services, which are covered under long-term insurance policies.

Farnum, a former management consultant for Fortune 100 companies in the United States, Asia and Europe, opted to invest in Home Instead Senior Care to cut back on time spent away from home.

Family responsibilities also played a role. "Les' 80-year-old mother was taking care of her 100-year-old mother," Farnum says. "We saw this was needed."

Research into Charlotte demographics also gave the Farnums comfort in taking the plunge. Mecklenburg County has more than 80,000 senior residents; the state expects that figure to rise 43% to 115,000 by 2011.

The Farnums' hunch about the market is playing out in their franchise's sales. Home Instead revenue reached \$1.2 million last year, up more than 30% from \$906,000 in 2002. Farnum is projecting a 28% sales increase for 2004.

She is a big advocate of training. All of Farnum's employees have undergone 14 months of training in areas such as home safety, cleaning, meal preparation and communicating with the elderly. Thirty-two have completed an Alzheimer's certification program.

Farnum attributes much of her company's success to a dedicated and compassionate staff.

In 2002, Omaha-based Home Instead Inc. named one of her employees, Levy Owens, as caregiver of the year in the Southeast. Owens received the award in recognition of his in-home care for an Alzheimer's patient. Only seven of the company's 17,000 employees receive the regional award each year.

"Our staff are compassionate people who love what they're doing," Farnum says. "It's very important that we keep our people with us."

In May, the Charlotte chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners presented Farnum with its Rising Star award, which recognizes success in a young business.

Farnum says her biggest challenge has been getting seniors to recognize their need for assistance. "It's a stigma in our society to age and ask for help. We want to make our services something people will embrace so they can remain independent for as long as possible."