

Guide to
Retirement Living

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Pioneering Care

By Christy Brudin

A pioneer paves the way for those who follow them. The paths they carve may not always be literal, but their work is always groundbreaking—and their influence is expansive.

This is certainly the case for Debra Levy Eldercare Associates (DLEA), an Aging Life Care™ Management company that has been serving the greater Washington, D.C. region for more than 28 years. DLEA was founded by Debra “Debbie” Levy, a true pioneer in the care management field. She established her practice when the profession was still in its infancy. Debbie was also very active helping to build the national association representing care managers (formerly the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers and rebranded in 2015 as the Aging Life Care Association, or ALCA), serving on both the local and national boards in a variety of roles.

When Debbie was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer in the summer of 2012, she reflected on both the personal and professional legacy that she would leave behind. Faced with a poor prognosis, foremost in her mind was ensuring that the company that she had started and grown over 24 years would continue to employ the staff she had hired and serve the company’s clients. She asked Susy Elder Murphy, then the Director of Care Management, if she would be willing to take on ownership of the company, and she agreed. Today, DLEA is still an independently owned and operated company that carries out Debbie’s mission to help aging adults throughout the region.

“The business ran uninterrupted throughout her illness and passing, just as she wanted it to,” Susy explained. “All of the staff remained with us, and we have continued to grow since I became owner, adding a new service and expanding our existing offerings.”

Debra Levy Eldercare Associates now offers traditional care management services; a WellSenior™ program; and Debbie’s Angels, a concierge companion service.

Care When She Needed It

Betty Hathcock is one of many local seniors who have benefited from the WellSenior program. Shortly after moving from Norfolk, VA, to be closer to her daughter, Karen, they met with Susy and enrolled in what became the WellSenior program.

“Debra Levy Eldercare was recommended to us through an employee assistance program at my job. They were suggested as someone who could help out if health issues arose, or if Mom ever needed extra assistance,” Karen recalled. “I thought it was a great idea, and mom was on board with it as well.”

Susy did an initial assessment with Betty and checked in with her regularly by phone, only visiting once a year since she remained very healthy. Over 18 months after their initial meeting, when Betty aspirated popcorn during movie night at her retirement community, DLEA was there to help.

“Susy came in the day after Mom went to the hospital to provide advice and support to me,” Karen said. “She helped me understand all of the details that were important to continuity of care for my mom, such as checking my mom’s medications on the discharge summary to make sure that they were correct. Sure enough, there were some errors that would not have been caught if we weren’t watching for them.”

Following her discharge, Susy helped Betty find the appropriate rehab center for recovery. Nine months later, she helped her navigate another hospitalization and rehab stay following surgery.

Ultimately, no matter what happens, Betty and Karen know that they always have an advocate. “I enjoy being with Mom, but

for me, I really appreciate having a relationship with DLEA, since they have the expertise we need when my mom has a medical crisis,” Karen concluded. Betty added, “It is just so imperative that we have DLEA when something happens. Thank goodness we do.”

Care to Stay Engaged

Lucy was living alone in her longtime home when her worsening dementia began to present problems. She had resisted previous attempts by her niece to move her or to have caregivers in her home, and she had recently started a small fire in her toaster oven.

A former singer, Lucy was also having difficulties continuing one of her most beloved routines. Every Sunday, she ventured to a local restaurant for dinner, followed by an evening of live music. She had become dependent on cab drivers to get her to and from the venue, and her friends had expressed concerns about her safety.



Betty Hathcock is one of many local seniors who have benefited from the WellSenior program.

Lucy's niece, Diane, and her husband, Bill, turned to DLEA for help. "It was immediately apparent that she wasn't safe at home anymore, so we helped them review the options in their area and found an assisted living facility offering memory care that met their needs," recalled Teresa Boring, a care manager and the Coordinator of the Debbie's Angels program.

Bill added, "DLEA provided stability for us and empathy for Lucy."

DLEA handled all of the aspects of relocating Lucy and helping her adjust to her new home. As she was settling into her new home, DLEA also addressed how she could continue her Sunday evening routine, which meant so much to her. Lucy became a part of the Debbie's Angels program and Liz Zarate, one of their concierge companions, began accompanying her to the restaurant every Sunday.

"We go to the venue early, and she wants to stay until everyone leaves," Liz says. "It's so much fun for her, and definitely enhances her life. She gets so much out of being able to enjoy the music and stay connected with her friends."

Since Lucy's move, her niece has passed away, so DLEA continues to work with Bill to ensure that she receives needed care and continues her special Sunday ritual, even as her dementia progresses. "Thank God they were there for us and are still there for me. They provide a service that is above and beyond expectations," he said.



With the help of the Debbie's Angels concierge companion service, Lucy is able to continue her beloved tradition of enjoying dinner and live music every Sunday.

Following a Pioneer

Susy Elder Murphy and her staff continue to carry on Debbie's mission of providing comprehensive, compassionate care management services to seniors and their families in the greater Washington, D.C. region. DLEA provides the help that is needed, whether it is advice and advocacy during a medical crisis or ongoing support to continue a beloved tradition. The staff of DLEA ensures that everyone receives the care they deserve—care worthy of an agency founded by a pioneer. GRL



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