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Home health agency cares for customers

Agency grows as it puts clients and employees ahead of margins

BY YVONNE AYALA MCCLELLAN • YMCLELLAN@NEWS-PRESS.COM • OCTOBER 31, 2010

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Keeping profit margins low has worked out well for Abby Services Inc., a Fort Myers-based home health agency.

Tom Strachan opened the business in 1997 and runs it with the help of his son, Scott, and daughter, Jaimee Thompson.

The business hires caregivers either part-time or full-time to care for elderly clients who need help with every-day functions or anyone who is suffering from long or short-term illness or injury.

It has anywhere from 40 to 70 caregivers available at any time for long- or short-term care helping with a variety of needs including physical therapy, light housekeeping, meal preparation, travel to doctors visits and more.

By focusing on customer service and offering competitive pay to employees, Abby Services has seen growth through the downturn.

In the first half of 2010 the business grossed about \$451,000 compared to \$381,000 for the same period a year ago -- a 15 percent increase year over year.

Scott Strachan attributes part of the growth to maintaining rates and keeping profit margins low, which helps the company pass on savings to clients and offer workers competitive pay.

"We're charging about as much as we did three or four years ago when unemployment was around 3 percent," Strachan said.

Strachan said the business fits the usual supply and demand model -- some clients have cut or canceled services to save dollars, and there are more caregivers looking for work.

By offering competitive pay, the company has attracted and retained experienced and highly qualified caregivers.

Abby Services has also seen a small increase in its client roster over the past year although the number of clients shrunk by as much as 50 percent in the past four years.

Being family owned and operated has always helped maintain clients' confidence and reassurance in the company's services, especially as the family is available 24 hours, seven days a week to help with caregiver assistance, Strachan said.

And while the industry is state regulated, the company's caregivers are insured and bonded although it is not required by the state, he said.

Those measures help protect clients in the instance that they are injured or there is a theft or damage to the client's personal property.

The company has also restructured its advertising to improve its outreach to potential customers.

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Abby Services, Inc. representatives are, from left, Assistant Administrator Jaimee Thompson, Executive Director Tom Strachan, Administrator Scott Strachan and Marketing Director Stacey Kay. (Sarah Coward, special to news-press.com)

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES

Scott Strachan recommends other business owners:

- Strive to provide fair and honest services, and don't mislead people
- Be helpful to the customer and help them find the service that best fits their needs -- even if it's not with you
- Don't be greedy: offer the client added value for the price

WHEN YOU GO

- What: Abby Services
- Where: 6314 Corporate Court, Suite E, Fort Myers
- When: Office hours from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., but available 24 hours a day for questions and caregiver assistance
- Details: Call 590-0861 or visit www.abbyservices.com for more information

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Home

Local News

- ▶ Bonita Springs
- ▶ Cape Coral
- ▶ Estero
- ▶ Fort Myers
 - ▶ River District
- ▶ Lehigh Acres
- ▶ North Fort Myers
- ▶ Sanibel Island
- ▶ South Fort Myers
- ▶ Other communities
 - ▶ Charlotte County
 - ▶ Fort Myers Beach
 - ▶ Naples
 - ▶ Pine Island
 - ▶ San Carlos Park

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- ▶ Archives
- ▶ Page print
- ▶ Business
 - ▶ Commercial Properties
 - ▶ Market Watch
 - ▶ Stock Quotes
- ▶ Crime
- ▶ Data/public records
- ▶ Lifestyles
 - ▶ Celebrations
 - ▶ Health & Fitness
 - ▶ Grandeur
 - ▶ Upbeat news
- ▶ Watchdog
- ▶ Moms
- ▶ Obituaries
- ▶ Traffic
- ▶ Child Welfare
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Election
- ▶ FEMA & your money
- ▶ Green
- ▶ Grandeur
- ▶ Nation & World
- ▶ Newspaper in Education
- ▶ Nonprofit Organizations
- ▶ Worship

Sports

- ▶ Boating & Fishing
- ▶ Everblades
- ▶ Golf
- ▶ High School Football
- ▶ High School Sports
- ▶ Scores & Stats (Pro)
 - ▶ AFL
 - ▶ AHL
 - ▶ CFL
 - ▶ Golf
 - ▶ MLB
 - ▶ MLS
 - ▶ NASCAR
 - ▶ NBA
 - ▶ NFL
 - ▶ NHL
 - ▶ WNBA
- ▶ Scores & Stats (College)
 - ▶ College Football
 - ▶ Men's College Basketball
 - ▶ Women's College Basketball
- ▶ Youth sports

Entertainment

- ▶ Arts & Theater
- ▶ Beaches
- ▶ Calendar
- ▶ Dating
- ▶ Dining
- ▶ Games
- ▶ Grandeur
- ▶ Metromix
- ▶ Movies
- ▶ Music
- ▶ My Cozi Calendar
- ▶ TV Listings

Watchdog

- ▶ Public records
- ▶ Sam Cook's column
- ▶ Sam Cook's blog
- ▶ Tell Me's column

Multimedia

- ▶ Buy a full page reprint
- ▶ Buy a photo
- ▶ How to videos
- ▶ Photo galleries
- ▶ Reader galleries
- ▶ Submit photos
- ▶ Videos
- ▶ Webcams

Opinion

- ▶ Blogs
- ▶ Columnists
- ▶ Forums
- ▶ Opinion
- ▶ Submit a photo
- ▶ Submit letter to the editor

Weather

- ▶ Hurricane

Classifieds

- ▶ At Your Service
- ▶ Cars
- ▶ Weekly Deals
- ▶ Grocery Coupons
- ▶ Jobs
- ▶ Legal Notices
- ▶ Pets
- ▶ Place an ad
- ▶ Real Estate
- ▶ Rentals
- ▶ Shopping

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- ▶ Contact us
- ▶ Manage my subscription
- ▶ Order Page Reprints
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