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A reason to clean

By Chris Roark, Staff Writer

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Local organization helps cancer patients with free cleaning

A Flower Mound business owner has found a good reason to clean, and many other cleaning services across the country are following her lead.

Debbie Sardone, owner of Buckets & Bows Maid Service in Lewisville, just celebrated her 27th year with the company.

Just as important to her is her fourth year of Cleaning for a Reason, a non-profit organization she created as a way to help women who are undergoing cancer treatment by cleaning their homes when they are physically or financially unable to do so.

Sardone established the organization in 2006 after speaking at a conference and discussing an initiative she had already implemented with Buckets & Bows.

"Fifteen years ago, we had an internal policy that if a woman could not afford our cleaning services and they indicated that they are undergoing cancer treatment, we would give them the service at cost or for free," Sardone said. "When I spoke at the conference to a group of maid service owners, many of them expressed interest in doing this but asked about the impact of giving away the service, as well as how to screen people. I could see that there was a great amount of willingness."

When Sardone returned from the conference, she began the filing process for becoming a 501(c)3 organization.

Now, less than four years later, Sardone's organization provides a way for women suffering from any type of cancer to still keep their homes clean. Those seeking assistance contact Cleaning for a Reason, which locates a cleaning service that belongs to the organization and is nearby the client. That company provides a cleaning service once a month for four months free of charge.

Rag Mops, a cleaning service that serves Lewisville and Flower Mound, is one company that is a partner in Cleaning for a Reason.

"This is such a tremendous relief for the patients," said Debi Bascue, owner of Rag Mops, which has provided more than \$5,000 in cleaning services in the two years it has been in the partnership. "This gives them a chance to

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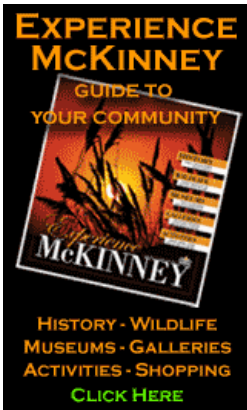
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deal with the other things that they have to deal with."

Bascue said something that may seem so little to some, such as having a clean bathroom, means everything to the patients.

"We're trying to get the cleaning company to the client in a time of their life when their energy is gone or they can't move much because of surgeries," said Pam King, marketing director for Buckets and Bows. "We're just trying to get them past this season of their lives."

Sardone, whose company is of course part of the Cleaning for a Reason network, said her organization has helped more than 9,000 people, provided \$350,000 in free cleaning services and has reached out to 480 service companies across the country and Canada.

Sardone said she expects the organization to attract its 500th cleaning service in October, which is one milestone.

Thursday represents another milestone as Buckets & Bows will host the Pink Champaign Celebration to commemorate a \$10,000 grant given to Cleaning for a Reason by the Women Helping Others (WHO) Foundation. The event will take place from 3-5 p.m. at the foundation's headquarters, 211 S. Stemmons Freeway, Suite G in Lewisville.

Sardone said the grant is important because as a fairly young non-profit group, the organization is limited on what it can do.

"We're underfunded because we're unknown," Sardone said. "It would be nice for more people to know about our cause because we're physically helping people."

Sardone said the organization is in need of volunteers, donations and sponsors.

She said another challenge the organization faces is more of an emotional one as cleaning employees often get attached to the patients they are helping.

"We see them go through the chemotherapy," Sardone said. "Some of them get well, but others don't."

But one challenge the organization never faces is reluctance. King said there hasn't been any cleaning company who has refused to join the organization when they are recruited by Cleaning for a Reason.

"Our employees are always volunteering to do this because it's so rewarding," Sardone said. "It feels good as a business owner to allow your employees to help others."

And offering the free service in today's economy isn't an issue, either.

"The economy is the economy," Bascue said. "This isn't something that we're going to change. We live and work here, and these are our people."

For information, go to www.cleaningforareason.org or call 972-219-0400.

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