

Better to Caregift than to Receive

By John Kinmonth



Going from giving orders as a CEO to filling them in the “Care Cottage,” Sandra Rorem defines the term “labor of love.”

When Sandra Rorem ran out of rungs on the corporate ladder, she opted to start over on the ground floor—of a cottage. Instead of allowing herself to be put out to pasture on the golf course, the former health care CEO and hospital administrator went from commanding thousands of employees and vast budgets at companies like Medalia Healthcare and ClearMedical to filling orders and sealing boxes in an adorably renovated cottage near the University of Washington.

But it’s a labor of love for this longtime Bellevue Club member. Two years ago, Sandra and a colleague started CareGifting, an online company that special-

izes in gift collections designed specifically for people undergoing medical treatment or recovering from an illness or surgery.

Despite a combined 40 years in the health care industry, the inspiration for CareGifting stems more from the personal experiences of Sandra and her partner Ginger Hines than from their professional lives.

“Both of us have had serious illnesses in our families where we have been predominantly caregivers,” says Sandra.

Before eventually succumbing to colon cancer, Sandra’s mother underwent treatment for laryngeal cancer.

“She had a very serious surgery in Minnesota, and

I'm out here and I'm so upset that I can't do anything for her, and I'm in health care," she says. "She had this radical surgery on her neck, and all she wants are some scarves that can cover it. She's telling me this on the phone, and I didn't know where to get them or how to get them to her.

"We now have those scarves in all colors," she adds.

Sandra also sat by her oldest son when he was critically ill at Harborview Medical Center. He eventually recovered, but the experience made an unforgettable mark on her.

"I think of the weeks we spent in that intensive care unit waiting room and what we would have needed," she says. "What could someone have sent us that could have helped us?"

Ginger had a similar experience when her father was diagnosed with an aggressive form of lymphoma in 1999.

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"It's a personal passion that drives us," Sandra says. "We thought, what could we do that would use all of this education and experience?"

"We realized in this day and age, first of all, health care is being delivered differently," she says. "You could have anything from your appendix out to minor procedures and they discharge now almost immediately or in two to three days due to the high cost of hospital care. That means you need a differ-

ent paradigm as to how people are cared for at home.

"A person has to be able to have things that help nurture their healing that do not add to the burden, gives them comfort, and even more importantly, lifts their spirits, too," she says.

Drawing on Sandra and Ginger's extensive health care experience, CareGifting.com offers a variety of gift collections with products that don't contain petrochemicals and other skin irritants. Any snacks included in the collections are natural and low in salt, and many are tailored to people with food or chemical allergies. Currently, the most popular package includes a journal, organic bamboo socks, olive oil lip balm, sleep balm with light aromatherapy, and several other comfort items. Depending on the situation, many of the items have practical uses designed for specific circumstances. Even the gift bag is designed as a tote that the patient can use to carry items back and forth to the hospital or the doctor's office.

Since its inception, business has been brisk at the "Care Cottage"—their affectionate name for the renovated space—with multiple orders shipping on a daily basis. CareGifting also gained a contract with Overlake Hospital to provide gift bags to newly-diagnosed oncology patients, as well as patients in their Total Joint Program.

While CareGifting receives orders from all over the country, Sandra's favorite aspect of the job is seeing how people respond to their friends, family and colleagues in need.

"You can't imagine the wonderful things they say, and how that will affect that person's ability to heal," she says. "We are the conduit that lets them show the concern, the care and the love that they feel for someone."

And, despite being a wife, mother of four and grandmother of 16, Sandra does not see retirement in the near future.

"If you're doing what you love, that's better than the golf course," she says.

"I do golf, by the way, and I love it," she adds.



CareGifting co-founders Sandra Rorem and Ginger Hines display some of their popular products.

5 Five Reflections

Sandra Rorem
Co-founder, CareGifting

FAVORITE BOOK:
"Kristin Lavransdatter" by Sigrid Undset

FIRST JOB:
Hospital dietary department during high school

BEST ADVICE:
Whatever you do, do it to the best of your ability no matter how menial the task. Reputation is a product of performance.

HERO/GREATEST INFLUENCE:
Paternal grandmother—she lived to 98 and kept going and contributing all her life.

FAVORITE ACTIVITY AT THE CLUB:
I love to eat here.