

2005 Nellie Cashman Award

Pamala Temple

A Place for Mom



Temple's referral firm gives seniors sense of place

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Pamala Temple couldn't get the funding for her first great idea: a business that provided therapy services to nursing homes.

Venture capitalists declined to fund the then-28-year-old's idea, saying she wasn't old enough. So Temple had to sit on the sidelines watching as that industry took off, and giant companies made millions building firms based upon the same idea.

"So when I thought of A Place for Mom in June (2000) I quit my job three weeks later," Temple said. "Once I saw the opportunity that was it. I was going to do it, and I've never looked back."

A Place for Mom Inc. is a national Internet referral service that helps families find elder care for free.

In just five short years, Temple has built a network of more than 10,000 senior housing facilities that pay her either a finder's fee or an annual retainer to be included in the network. A Place for Mom's 110 family advisors, stationed around the United States, have helped more than 60,000 families find care for their loved ones.

Revenues this year are expected to reach \$8.5 million.

Temple, a former vice president of marketing for Regent Assisted Living, said her experience of watching how the majority of clients discovered Regent's facilities proved to her that people need help finding senior care.

"Our biggest source of inquiries came from drive-bys," Temple said. "That's not a good way to have to do that, and since there are so many options today, someone needs to assist them."

Temple co-founded Seattle-based A Place for Mom with her husband, John, 10-year Microsoft Corp. finance and marketing veteran, and Brian Trisler, John's college roommate and founder of Montana-based Viata, a vacation rental housing company.

A Place for Mom does not recommend one location over another. Instead, family advisors give customers information about facilities in their area and the types of care that are offered. About 60 percent of the company's initial contacts happen through the company web site, www.aplaceformom.com, while the rest come from referrals from physicians, social service agencies, friends and other marketing efforts.

The company also created a software program called You've Got Leads, which helps nursing homes keep track of customer leads. Some 2,700 people now use the system, Temple said. The software was born out of the company's need to keep track of potential customers as well as the problems Temple had working with complicated software programs at a number of different facilities.

The Pennsylvania native knew she'd be running her own company some day. Temple's parents were entrepreneurs: Her mother owned a hair salon for 25 years, and her dad runs a brick and stone distribution company out of Pittsburgh. The youngest daughter of four, Temple was a nationally ranked tennis player, and she loves to play golf.

She entered Clarion College in Pennsylvania with the idea of becoming a speech pathologist.

"But in my second year, I thought, 'What have I done?' I knew I couldn't transfer, so I took all the electives I could in business," she said. She followed up her bachelor's degree with a master's in health administration from the University of Pittsburgh.

She charted a career path that allowed her to progress up the ladder at various facilities, a path that led to jobs in at least seven states to get the experience she thought she'd need, and to look for "the right idea."

The 42-year-old Temple is still setting goals and making plans. This time the goal is to make A Place for Mom a national brand. After getting away to Montana for a short vacation with her husband and 17-month-old daughter Zoë, Temple's to-do list includes filling out the management team with a director of marketing, an additional sales executive, and several developers.

And she's also laying plans to bring the number of family advisors — full-time employees who work in their hometowns — to 400 by the end of 2006.

"I love a challenge," said Temple, who's known for her sunny disposition. "I want people around me who see the sunshine every day. I believe there's no problem we can't tackle or fix."

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