

# Redstone Highlands subsidiary to offer home medical care services

BY KRIS B. MAMULA

A Westmoreland County retirement community is pivoting into home care, 10 months after starting to offer non-medical home companion services.

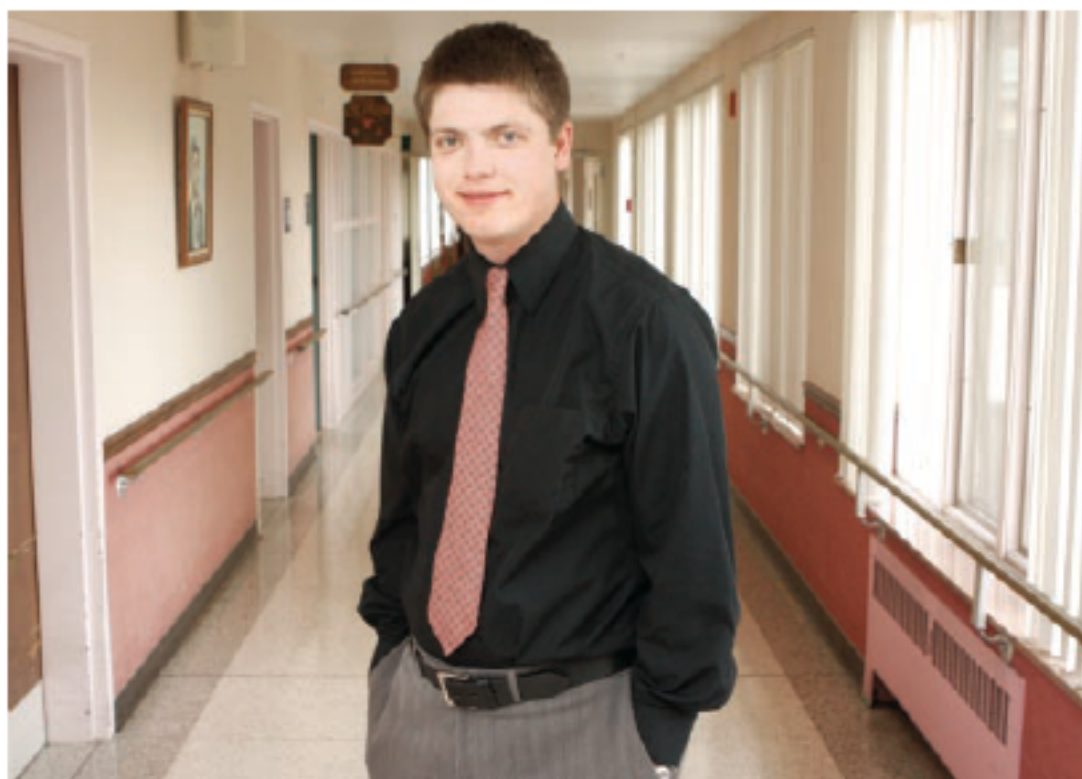
Senior Independence of Southwestern Pennsylvania became a Medicare home care provider Nov. 9 and will ramp up over the next two months, said Geoff Gehring, executive director of home and community based services. The company is a wholly owned subsidiary of Greensburg-based Redstone Presbyterian SeniorCare, a continuing care retirement community.

Also, Senior Independence is considering developing adult day services to complement home care by providing transportation, activities and other amenities for older people who otherwise might have to be cared for in a nursing home.

"This type of work is a little different than what Redstone is used to," Gehring said. "We're going to have to come up with other plans as nursing homes evolve. It'll be a community service organization."

In the continuing care retirement community model, elderly people pay an entrance and monthly maintenance fees to live in a specially designed community that offers independent, personal and skilled nursing care as needed. CCRC's are considered insurance products, with regulatory oversight by the state Insurance Department.

Medicare-certified home care providers



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Senior Independence executive director Geoffrey Gehring says the wholly owned subsidiary became a Medicare home care provider Nov. 9.

offer physical, speech and occupational therapy during home visits with patients, often after discharge from a hospital or nursing home. Home companions provide non-medical assistance, including help with such things as meal preparation, transportation to appointments and personal grooming.

Employment in the new service lines could reach 100 during the next three years. Redstone, which has an occupancy rate over

90 percent, employs around 400 people.

Senior Independence was formed when Redstone had to turn to outside providers when residents were released to home from the hospital or skilled care facility, Gehring said. Since then, the company has expanded into offering electronic monitoring of residents living in Redstone's independent living units.

In June, Senior Independence teamed

with Jeannette-based Unified Alerts LLC to offer wireless monitoring for medicine reminders, inactivity alerts, wandering detection and other services from a terminal installed in the apartment, said Vice President Rob Welts. The technology is being used in five units at Redstone, and alerts are provided to family members and staff at Senior Independence.

The terminal also has a simplified Skype telephone function, Welts said.

"We lit up the whole campus for Wi-Fi," Welts said. "There's a ton of power in that terminal. This is such cool technology."

The service can help residents delay or avoid having to move into a more structured — and costly — environment such as personal or skilled care.

Home care is a difficult, but growing business, partly due to the state Department of Public Welfare's focus on "right-sizing" nursing home occupancy by increasing funding for community-based support agencies, according to Ransom Towsley, senior director of community services at Oakmont-based Presbyterian SeniorCare, the region's biggest senior living provider. Presby SeniorCare last year purchased a non-medical home care agency and renamed it Senior Care at Home, which has since grown by 12 percent to 15 percent, with about half of the clients coming from inside the Presby SeniorCare community.

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