

As Seen In

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LEADING WOMEN IN BUSINESS: CLEVELAND

# A Woman Reinvented

A franchise opportunity changed **Connie Hill-Johnson's** life—personally and professionally—for the better.



For the first two years that Connie Hill-Johnson owned her Visiting Angels® homecare franchise, she worked out of the basement of her mother's Cleveland home, the same place she played with her Easy-Bake Oven and Barbie® dolls as a child. Today, more than 15 years later, her business is flourishing with approximately 60 clients at any given time and a staff of nearly 75 caregivers, nursing assistants, and home health aides.

"The No. 1 lesson I learned in those early years is that you'll never work as hard for someone else as you'll work for yourself," Hill-Johnson says. "I put

in an awful lot of 14–16 hour days back then, but it's all been worth it."

## LEARNING TO TAKE RISKS

Hill-Johnson was living in St. Louis and working in health care administration in September 2001 when the world suddenly changed. Within a year, the U.S. economy had declined, and she was laid off. A friend suggested she consider purchasing a franchise.

As she studied her options, one in particular stood out: Visiting Angels®, a senior homecare provider that assists the elderly with personal hygiene, meal preparation, light housekeeping, medication reminders, transportation, and errands. The decision to go for it, she says, was scary, but she felt safer staying in the health care industry, a space she knew well. And by deciding to move back to her native Cleveland at over 40 years of age and reside temporarily with her mother, money was less of a worry.

"I'm keenly aware that I encountered less risk than another woman might face," Hill-Johnson explains. "I don't have children, and at the time I was single. Those are responsibilities that I didn't have to factor into my decision." Nonetheless, it did take careful consideration and six months to start her new life as a franchise owner.

## PROVIDING CARE AND COMFORT

Helping clients find caregivers to come into their home or the home of their loved one was an easy transition for

Hill-Johnson. At one time or another, both of her parents benefited from the services of a homecare agency. Her mother, who had Alzheimer's disease, was cared for by Visiting Angels® caregivers until she passed away. At first, they helped with small services and eventually provided 24/7 care and companionship in the home she had lived in for more than 50 years.

"I know from personal experience the comfort that comes from knowing vetted professionals are caring for your parents when you can't, and I'm pleased to be able to offer comfort to families in similar circumstances," she says.

Today Hill-Johnson and her husband, Kevin Johnson, who provides strategic direction to the franchise, are plotting the next moves for the 15-year-old business. She refers to Visiting Angels® as her "baby" and says that even after all this time, it's hard to step back, although she's trying. She's spending more time in the field, building relationships and branding, and she's parlayed her success into a number of board positions and speaking engagements.

"Even after all these years, there's still tremendous upside to this business as baby boomers are aging and geography frequently separates family members," Hill-Johnson concludes. "Being trusted enough to provide care to families in need is an honor and a privilege. I'm grateful for all Visiting Angels® has brought me."

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