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MARCH 2006 \$3.75

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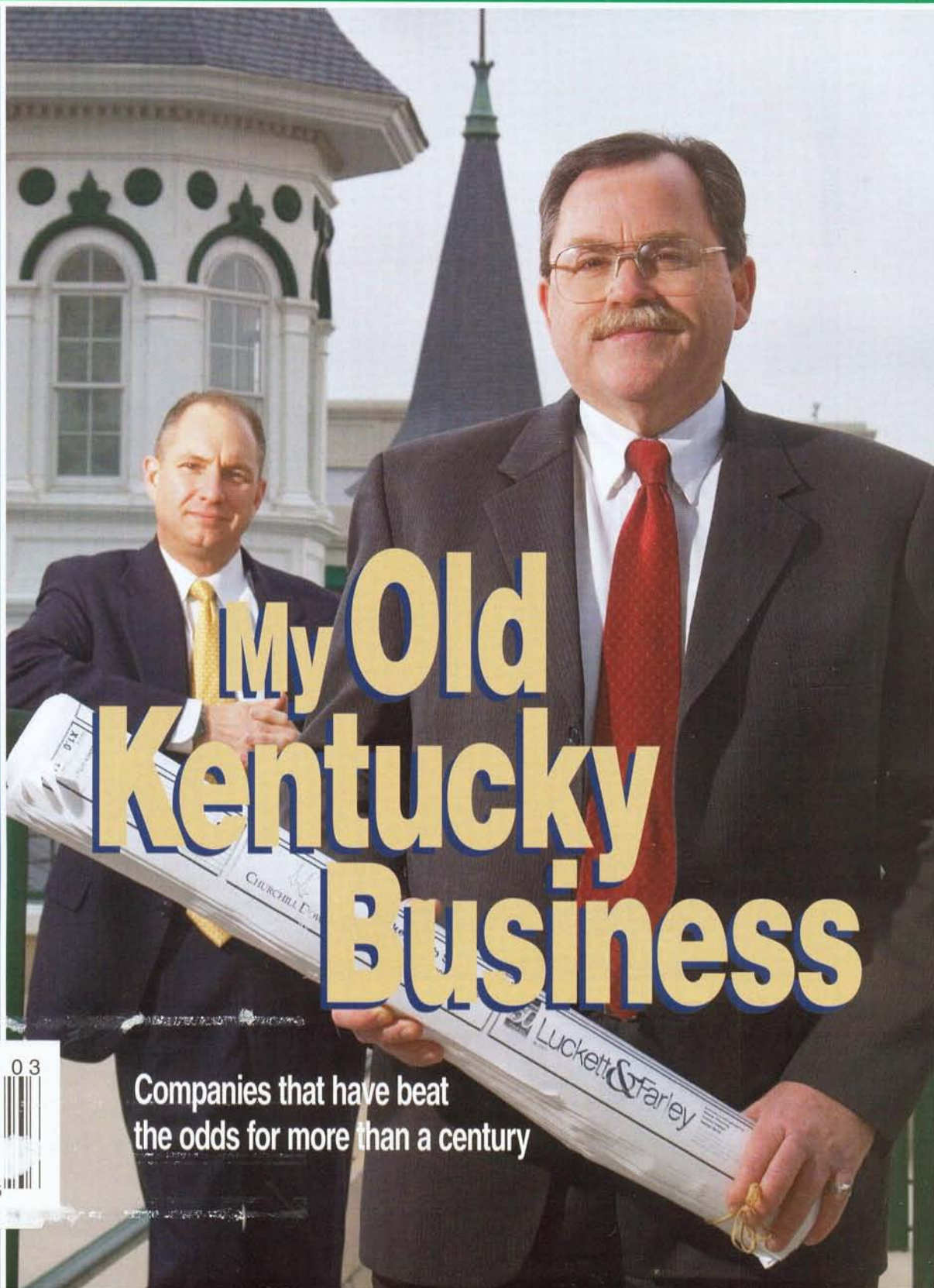
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My Old Kentucky Business

Companies that have beat the odds for more than a century



Louisville's First Lady of Home Care

Merrily Orsini turned social work lessons into a home-health legacy

BY MARY O'DOHERTY

MERRILY Orsini pioneered the geriatric in-home care business in Louisville in 1981 when she founded Eldercare Solutions. With a master's in social work from the University of Louisville, Orsini used her education in social work and expertise in geriatrics to earn the trust of hundreds of families struggling to provide services to aging relatives.

The business had more than 200 employees when Orsini sold it to a national competitor in 1996.

"It was such a new field, they weren't even teaching geriatric medicine at that time," Orsini said. "There simply wasn't much geared toward geriatrics and chronic illnesses that affect the aging."

Orsini spent the next several years cultivating the company that became corecubed, an integrated marketing communications company with eight employees.

It didn't take long for her two career paths to merge. Now corecubed specializes primarily in health care marketing, and Orsini, 58, is recognized as a national expert in the field of marketing home health care and private duty home care.

So when the editors of a national journal on home health care decided to devote one issue to private duty home care services, they tapped Orsini to coordinate it. The February issue of *Home Health Care Management & Practice Journal* focuses on private duty home care services for senior citizens and the ill, a sector that is growing dramatically as consumers turn to home care rather than institutions for their long-term care needs.

The opportunity came just as corecubed's growth took off. Revenues increased by 53.3 percent from 2004 to 2005, and net income increased 95.5 percent during the same period. corecubed provides marketing and public relations for other business sectors as well, but home health is the company's focus, comprising 56 percent of its revenue.

Though corecubed was already doing some home health work, Orsini connected with that sector in a big way when her com-

pany was hired as agency of record for the National Private Duty Association (NPDA), an Indianapolis-based trade association for private duty agencies. Private duty agencies refer home health care workers to people who want to be cared for in their homes. They are paid with private funds.

NPDA requires its members to employ their direct care staff and provide criminal background and other checks on its caregivers. With corecubed's assistance, the trade association helped push through legislation requiring criminal background checks and other checks on employees in two states and proposed legislation introduced in a few other states. corecubed also takes credit for helping the organization's member rolls grow from 450 companies in 2004 to more than 600 companies in 44 states, including Puerto Rico.

Working for NPDA helped corecubed land marketing and public relations work for some of the giants in the home health care industry as clients, including Right at Home, an Omaha-based home care franchise with around 100 offices in 30 states.

corecubed is redesigning Right at Home's Web site and just finished a multi-page full-color brochure the company will use to target professional referral sources — social workers, elder law attorneys and geriatric care managers.

This month, corecubed opened an office near Portland, Ore. to expand its service in the Pacific Northwest.

"Because Merrily actually ran a home health care company, she has a unique perspective on the issues this industry faces," said Allen Hager, who founded Right at Home and is on NPDA's board. "She did a very good job for us. Not everybody can move from doing it to consulting about it."



Merrily Orsini

In 1996, Orsini's entrepreneurial savvy earned her the Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award for Kentucky and Indiana and induction into the Entrepreneur of the Year Institute. That same year, the National Association of Women Business Owners named her one of its Women Business Owners of the Year for Kentucky. She also was the first woman president of the downtown Louisville Rotary Club and was awarded the Business & Professional Women of Achievement Award in 1998.

corecubed sells products online at www.markethomecare.com geared toward smaller home health care services, and the company is beginning to market a manual of operations it created for anyone who wants to start a private-duty home care company.

The manual, which includes templates for policy and procedure manuals, teaches would-be in-home care providers how to market, schedule and provide geriatric care management.

The manual also teaches home health care providers how to find and hire good employees, probably the most important issue facing the dramatically growing home-care sector. As more families turn to home care for their loved one's long-term care needs, the number of people who work as caregivers in private homes has exploded, creating a largely unregulated workforce.

The manual was a labor of love because it

allowed Orsini to return to her roots. Orsini believes an important factor in Eldercare Solution's success was her commitment to improving training for the sector's workforce. She helped create and run a state licensed eldercare certifica-

tion program for home health care workers.

"When I started, there really wasn't anyone solving the problems of the long-term medical in-home care," Orsini said. "There were nursing services and companions and Medicare. But in terms of really trying to match up people who liked to provide care, who were trained and who understood the issues of aging, there wasn't much available."

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