



## Merrily Orsini '69 AS: Changing the business of home health care

By Hal Morris

"I haven't done that much more than anyone else, but I'm flattered that someone thinks I did. It was even more flattering because my staff nominated me. I've won a lot of awards before, but those were earlier in my career," says Orsini, who took her two managing directors with her to the awards. "I've spent the last 20 years just working behind the scenes and trying to support the home health care industry from a business standpoint."

It is a caper to a nearly 40-year career Orsini built out of her passion for helping others.

"I just love the industry," she says. "It's impossible to divorce yourself from the emotional aspect. It's a very emotionally-laden business from all sides. It's not just for the person you're caring for, but it's emotional for the adult children — everybody. The product you sell when you provide home health care is the person providing the care. We always said we would not hire anybody unless we'd have them in our own home caring for our own mothers. So we have very high standards. As long as we are doing that, everything works out well."

Not that Orsini is slowing down. In fact, she continues to find new ways to educate about the virtues of home health care.

Working with the National Association for Home Care & Hospice along with Axxess Technology in Dallas, Orsini is developing and launching a podcast and leading a campaign initiative to educate the community on health care at home.

"The lowest cost health care is provided in-home if it's appropriate. But a lot of people don't know that. A lot of people think they have to go to a nursing home," she says. "We are educating them about what can be done at home. We offer up all the things we are doing, all our resources in our industry. I'm really excited about it."

"It's something people don't think about until there's a need, and then they are at the mercy of whoever refers them to where they need to be. Home care executives wanted info they could pass on to their constituents, and finally it hit me that this is exactly how to do it."

It was a lack of home health care services that got Orsini into the business in the first place.

She wanted to start her own business, having earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Kentucky in 1969 and her master's degree in social work from the University of Louisville in 1977, and noticed there was a gap in services in home health care.

"I really created it from a need. I had a friend who worked at Jewish Family and Vocational Services. They had a client who needed someone to sit with them and that's how it started," she says. "I staffed someone to sit with her and her husband. He died unexpectedly, and I inherited this woman who was a delightful person but had Alzheimer's and dementia. But she was a client for 15 years. Once I did it for this one person, I saw there was a huge need."

In 1981, Orsini started her first home health care company, Elder Care Solutions, which she ran for 15 years before selling. Along the way, she received a prestigious Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award, one of more than 20 she has earned in her career. In 1998, Orsini founded corecubed, a home care marketing firm.

"The model I developed was from the need, not from another model," she says. "And that model I started and used and sold is what Humana at Home currently uses."

One affect her business has also taught Orsini is thinking about how she will manage later in life. She purchased long-term care insurance 21 years ago, so that will help pay for the cost of living at home.

"I've renovated a house I plan on living in the rest of my life. The living area is on one floor and there is an area for someone to live downstairs to take care of me," she says. "I very much have planned, and I would love to stay at home if I could. But I try to keep myself healthy and do many things I also recommend to people. Staying active is the biggest thing. Retiring is really not good for people."

"But it's a crapshoot. You can always fall and break something or be in an accident. But for the most part, if you continue to remain mentally and physically active, aging is an easier process." ■

**M**errily Orsini '69 AS got sage advice at a young age on how to run a business.

"My mother always said hire people better or smarter than you are," she says. "So that's what I've tried to do in my career."

That advice has paid off for Orsini, the founder and chief executive officer of corecubed, a home health care marketing company located in Asheville, North Carolina.

Last fall, she capped off her successful career with a Silver Stevie Award for Lifetime Achievement

in Business at the annual Steve Awards for Business in New York. The awards are the world's top honors for female entrepreneurs, executives, employees and the organizations they run. While she has won many awards in her career, Orsini says this was particularly special.