

South Florida BUSINESS JOURNAL

COUPON CRAZE:

Companies cash in on consumers' love for discounts

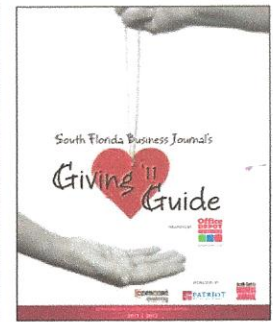
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Home health franchise expands with new Broward business

BY BRIAN BANDELL

When Angelo Sochuk wanted to start a business, he thought of his mother's difficult experience being cared for by home health aides, and decided to pursue that growing field.

Sochuk joined with Chicago-based BrightStar Care, becoming the first of its two franchisees in Broward County. The franchise recently started a South Florida growth initiative.

Sochuk has worked in management for health care companies for years, most recently as general manager for Baxter Healthcare in Venezuela. Due to the country's uncertain political climate, he moved to South Florida and decided to start a business with his son.

Sochuk liked the BrightStar Care franchise because the company provided extensive training and it could refer temporary staffing assignments to his nurses through its national contracts. Instead of billing Medicare or Medicaid, it works with insurance companies and patients who pay out of pocket.

The company has eight employees and should grow to 20 in the next year, Sochuk said. He expects \$500,000 in revenue in his first year, followed in subsequent years by \$1 million and more than \$1.5 million.

His company covers the southeastern corner of Broward. A second franchise was signed for the northeastern part of the county, said Ray Moore, VP of franchise development for BrightStar. There are three franchises in Palm Beach County, but none in Miami-Dade County. He said there is room

for an additional eight or 10 franchises from Kissimmee and south. It has 250 locations nationwide.

"Experience in health care is not a factor," Moore said of potential franchisees. "Our top-performing franchisee has zero health care background. We look for people with a passion for business."

When considering whether to sign a franchise agreement, an investor should consider how much support the company can provide them, especially in marketing and getting licensed, Boca Raton attorney Marlyn J. Wiener said. They should talk to previous franchisees and make sure the business model is profitable, she added.

Moore said BrightStar guides franchisees through nurse hiring and getting licensed. It has a proprietary IT system for scheduling and documenting patient interactions, and also provides local advertising and marketing, plus 24-hour customer support.

BrightStar requires franchisees to invest \$100,000 in cash and have the ability to borrow another \$100,000 for their business. They must have a net worth of \$500,000 to qualify, he added. The franchise fee starts at \$47,500, and the sales royalty is 5 percent.

"They are not only giving you the tools and training to run the business, but they are also giving you a revenue stream in the national accounts, so you can start off on that," Sochuk said.

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