

Julianne Roth

President and owner of Companions for Living, West Hartford.

Highest education: Master's degree in organizational behavior, University of Hartford.

Executive insights:

Honesty and directness help her as a business owner.

'If I can do something or if I can't do something, I'll always be really clear about that. ... In my opinion, it's always valuable to set expectations appropriately, to not overpromise things, to be upfront and candid.'



Companions for Living founder Julianne Roth stands outside her West Hartford office on Farmington Avenue and Mountain Road.

Roth matches compassion with entrepreneurial spirit

By John Stearns

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Julianne Roth tried her entrepreneurial hand straight out of college, launching an errand-running business. It lasted about a year and Roth discovered she had more to learn about owning and running her own venture.

She's learned well. Today, Roth, 49, is the president and owner of Companions for Living, the fifth-largest woman-owned business in the Hartford region with 124 local employees. The business turns 10 years old in September.

"I haven't looked back since," she says. Roth developed her business acumen working 18 years in the corporate world, largely in customer-facing areas, including sales and customer service. She also earned her master's degree and maintained her entrepreneurial spirit.

A few years before starting West Hartford-based Companions for Living she had been harboring a desire to make a difference in the world and not feel like a "cog in the wheel" anymore.

"I didn't know if it meant something with children, or rescue animals or the environment, all of those noble causes that we all have in the back of our brain," Roth says. "But I did know that I was a single mom at the time with two young boys and I didn't have time working full-time and taking care of them to volunteer anywhere."

So, when the corporate layoff ax hit her in May 2005, she looked to venture off on her own to find something that matched her desire for helping people.

She eventually started her own company, incorporating the customer service she had learned with her desire to help others. She also had a personal understanding of family care decisions after her family struggled with her grandmother's care.

"As many people do, we hired her cleaning lady to live with her and it was a horrible situation, but we didn't know any better," Roth says.

Today, her company's business is to make life better for the elderly, disabled and their families. Companions for Living is a homecare company providing anything from light housekeeping, meal preparation,

transportation and personal care to memory care, with a specialization in dementia care. It is not a medical agency and does not do physical or occupational therapy or provide nursing services.

"The memory care is more of enrichment and helping people to engage," Roth says of the company's program developed in partnership with Hebrew Health Care. Roth and her top managers are certified dementia practitioners.

She estimates 80 percent of her clients have some form of memory impairment, from forgetfulness to full-blown dementia or Alzheimer's.

Companions for Living's clients are primarily elderly, but the company also works with younger adults with disabilities, and "anybody who needs help," she says.

Care is provided by the hour or on a live-in basis.

Roth relies largely on referrals for business, but also markets her company through community involvement.

"I find getting my word out, marketing my company that way, is not only effective but satisfying to me because I feel like, again, I'm giving back to the community," she says.

She also sponsors events like her sixth annual Vino and a Show on May 14 at Playhouse on Park. This year's show features "The Not So Newlywed Game" with couples married at least 50 years.

"... We're constantly trying to get our name out there in different ways ...," she says.

West Hartford Mayor Scott Slifka says Roth is omnipresent.

"She's one of those people that you might take for granted the contributions she makes to the community as a whole, because she's always there," he says. "When you talk about people who comprise the real fabric of the community, she's one of those people. And she may not be known to every resident in town, but to people like me, she's somebody who's known quite well."

She is a good mix of assertive, direct and compassionate, Slifka says.

Says Roth, "If I can do something or if I can't do something, I'll always be really clear about that. In my opinion, it's always valuable to set expectations appropriately, to not overpromise things, to be upfront and candid." ■

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