



## Honored caregiver also was a friend

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For the exceptional care she provided for a Western Springs senior, Mira Warda was recently named Caregiver of the 2nd Quarter for Home Helpers and Direct Link, a national franchise with more than 500 locations.

"We wrote the application," said Mike Doepke, co-owner with his wife, Mary, a nurse, of the franchise's Hinsdale location.

"She received a plaque, a gift card and a letter from the franchise's president suitable for framing. So we framed it."

Warda has worked for the Doepkes for more than four years, almost all of them as a live-in caregiver, three or four days a week, for Margaret.

A native of Syria, Warda worked in home care for the Syrian Foundation. She emigrated with her family to the United States in 2000. Here, she studied infectious diseases, hearing problems, geriatrics and Alzheimer's disease.

Margaret, 91 when Warda met her, used a walker. For the last two years of her life, she was confined to a wheelchair. She had heart and blood pressure problems.

Warda was responsible for Margaret's personal care. She did light housekeeping, shopped for groceries and did her banking.

"In nice weather, I walked the mile or so to Casey's Market," Warda recalled. "In winter, I drove."

The two women became fast friends.

"I loved her," Warda said. "She used to tell me not to take a vacation. For three years, I didn't."

Warda cooked for Margaret and, once a week, for Margaret's daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren, too.

"She loved the dolmas (stuffed grape leaves) I made," Warda said.



Caregiver Mira Warda was named Caregiver of the Quarter by Home Helpers and Direct Link, a national franchise with more than 500 locations. She's an employee of the Hinsdale office. (Steve Johnston/Staff Photographer)

"And she loved having her family around."

Warda always went the extra mile for her friend.

"She liked the way flowers looked in her yard," Warda explained. "So every year, I planted 100 daffodils for her."

She was with Margaret when she

died, peacefully, in her own home. At her funeral in August, her family recognized the special relationship Warda and Margaret shared. Warda lives in Franklin Park with her husband and their three daughters, 20, 23 and 25.

Every Saturday, she enjoys breakfast at Denny's with them.

"I like their Grand Slams — with hash browns," Warda said.

Every Sunday, she volunteers at her church. And every day, she carries a part of her special friend with her.

"I'm a Cubs fan now and a Republican," Warda says. "She's responsible for that."