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Assisted-living entrepreneur branches out

■ Garrett launches home-care services company

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STAFF WRITER

After 14 years of bringing seniors into assisted-living homes to meet their needs, a Bowie entrepreneur is about to take those services to seniors.

RoseMary Garrett, 61, owns and manages two assisted-living homes in Bowie and Upper Marlboro under the name Rose's Place. Each home accommodates eight seniors, with an average age of 79.

"I always loved working with seniors, so I figured why not do a place that's comfortable and where they can be in their own place?" asked Garrett, a registered nurse.

Garrett's facilities are remodeled homes amid family communities and have both private and shared rooms, a kitchen, an activity room and a visiting room for families. She also provides an elevated garden, where residents grow vegetables.

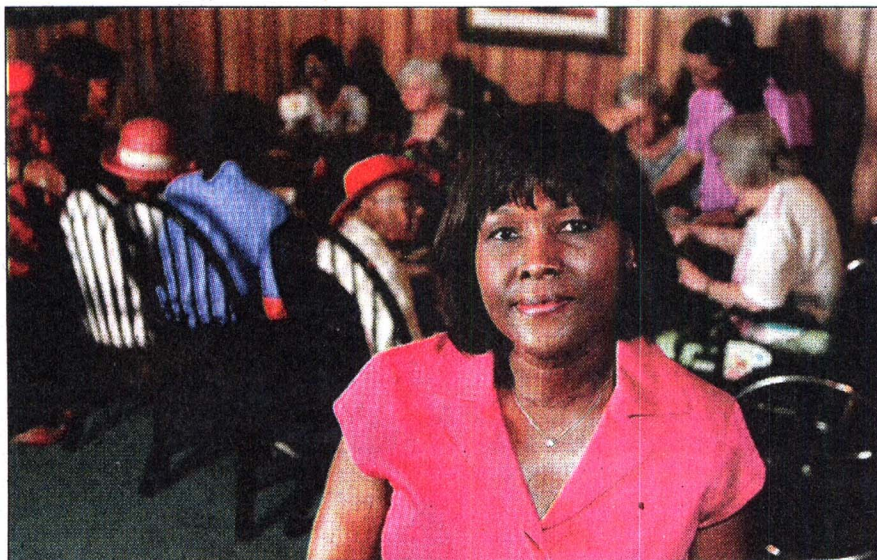
About 1 million people live in 38,000 assisted-living homes nationwide, paying an average of \$3,022 per month, according to the National Center for Assisted Living. This price is higher in urban areas. A resident's average age is 87.

"When people need a place for their loved ones, they call us," Garrett said.

She said although Rose's Place did some advertising when it began, she has not had to market the facilities in the past few years. Word of mouth has served her well, she said.

"The people there are what make it stand out," said Ann Desoto of Bowie, whose mother still is in Garrett's care after her father died last year. "I couldn't have asked for better."

Desoto said Rose's Place's staff of older women, who let residents watch them cook and engage them in songs and games, makes the place feel like a "real family home."



ANTHONY CASTELLANO/THE GAZETTE

"We're in business to provide the best care we can at an affordable price," says RoseMary Garrett, 61, the owner of Rose's Place, a company that runs assisted-living homes in Bowie and Upper Marlboro.

Residents pay from \$3,000 to \$4,000 per month, although Garrett said she will work with families with financial problems. That would put her annual revenues somewhere between \$576,000 and \$768,000.

"We're in business to provide the best care we can at an affordable price," she said.

She said she hopes to apply that model to her new startup, Home Helpers, which will offer free in-home consultations and work with clients to tailor specific plans to meet their needs and budgets. Home Helpers will provide companionship, meal preparation, light housekeeping, local transportation, dressing assistance, personal grooming and bathing and medication reminders.

Home Helpers has started with a staff of four, but Garrett has set a goal of 100 employees, if everything goes according to plan. Rose's Place has eight employees.

She said she launched Home Helpers to diversify, as her budget and license allows her to house only eight seniors per home, while the client base

could be virtually unlimited for home care. Garrett originally considered opening another facility.

"I saw a need for this type of care. Seniors have very limited funds; we couldn't just keep buying homes. And some people don't want to move," she said.

Garrett hopes the word of mouth that has promoted Rose's Place works for Home Helpers.

"When you put a business plan together, it doesn't sound like a lot of work, but now I'm in the meat of things," she said.

"The assisted-living industry continues to grow at a modest pace and remains a popular choice for seniors," said David Kylo, executive director of the National Center for Assisted Living.

He said the greatest challenge the industry faces is how to deliver services to low-income customers, especially in an economic downturn in which states are cutting back on programs and shifting policies that once funded homes.