

## Maid with Care : Local women with cancer eligible for free cleaning service

SANTA BARBARA NEWS PRESS

Tuesday, May 19, 2009

"LIFE" SECTION PAGE D1

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May 19, 2009 10:17 AM

A tradition ingrained by Spencer Dean's Jewish ancestry is making life easier for women coping with cancer in the Santa Barbara area.

The owner of MasterCare Home Cleaning Services in Goleta, Mr. Dean provides four free monthly cleanings to women from Carpinteria to Winchester Canyon.

"There are no restrictions as to age, financial need, stage of their medical condition or house size. All we need is basic health information certified by their oncologists," he said.

His company has been providing the free cleanings since 2006, when he became aware of Cleaning for a Reason (C4R), a nonprofit agency dedicated to arranging house cleaning at no charge exclusively for women currently being treated for any kind of cancer.

"It was exactly what I was looking for. Philanthropy is part of the Jewish tradition. My grandmother lived with my family in Chicago until she died at the age of 93," said Mr. Dean, 58. "She had a blue box - a tzedakah box it was called - and the tradition of giving tzedakah is a basic part of Jewish living. Every day, she would put her extra change in it. On Fridays, she would take the box to the temple to give the money to the poor. She never missed a Friday, even in her 90s.

"The memory always stayed with me. That's how I was raised - to take care of people who couldn't take care of themselves," he said.

As owner of Woody's BBQ on Hollister Avenue from 1982 to 2005, Mr. Dean had no problem giving back to the community, contributing food and money to numerous local charities - the annual Cerebral Palsy Rib-Eating Contest, Muscular Dystrophy Association's Black and Blue Ball, the Alzheimers Walk, to name a few.

"But when I started this business (home cleaning) in July 2006, there was no food to give away," he said with a smile during an interview at his office on Hollister Avenue in Old Town Goleta. "I was looking for ways to give, and I wanted to keep my employees busy."

He called Visiting Nurse and Hospice Care, Alzheimers Association, Hospice of Santa Barbara and Cancer Center of Santa Barbara, and offered free cleaning.

From personal experience, Mr. Dean knew that people with a disabling disease care about day-to-day living - getting kids to school, vacuuming and dusting, mopping floors in the kitchen and bathroom and doing the laundry.



Spencer Dean, owner of MasterCare Home Cleaning Services in Goleta, has been providing free home cleanings for local women since 2006, when he learned about Cleaning for a Reason (C4R), a nonprofit agency dedicated to arranging house cleaning at no charge exclusively for women currently being treated for any kind of cancer.

"Having MasterCare come in and work their magic has just lifted a weight off my shoulders," said Tami Finseth, who has time to enjoy a green protein shake as Oscar Nieblas and Angelia Aguilera of MasterCare Home Cleaning Services tidy up her kitchen.

"In 1978, my wife Nancy and I moved back to Chicago from Venice, Calif., to care for my mother-in-law before she died of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease)," he said. "Then, in 2002, Nancy died of the same disease, which she had for 20 months. She was 47 years old. We had been married for 24 years. She was my partner in Woody's."

Although Mr. Dean had been in food-related businesses for 40 years, he decided after his wife's death he needed to find something less demanding than owning a popular restaurant. His four sons were ages 10 through 19 at the time.

"I needed to find a business where I could work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday to allow me to take care of my sons," he said, adding that they are now 17 through 26, and he is engaged to Linda Grand, a librarian at Adams School.

While trying to decide what to do, he became friends with a woman in Simi Valley who owned a house cleaning business.

"I realized I could do that although she warned me it wasn't as easy as it might look," Mr. Dean said, who seems to have taken on the challenge successfully.

His goal when he opened MasterCare was to offer an "upscale, unlimited range of services and to be as green as possible. At this point, 80 percent of our cleaning products are green."

In addition to himself and his office manager, there are 14 cleaners or "cleaning techs" who tidy the abodes of apartment dwellers as well as celebrities and other affluent residents. Business has been particularly brisk since the Jesusita fire.

Several months after starting MasterCare, Mr. Dean attended a conference for house cleaners in Chicago. It was there that he met Deborah Sardone, who founded Cleaning for a Reason in May 2006.

"I was one of the first 25 companies to sign up with C4R, and we are the first chapter in Santa Barbara County. Today, there are 400 companies offering C4R in 44 states," said Mr. Dean. "I like the term they use - "benevolence cleaning" so the clients can focus on their health."

The only problem for Mr. Dean is that not enough women are aware of the service.

"There are months when we don't have any clients. We try to get the word out with brochures at doctors' offices and other medical facilities," he said.

Asked why the service is only for women, Mr. Dean said he assumes it's because women still do most of the housework.

A bit teary-eyed, Mr. Dean stressed how important the free service has become to him.

"My mother was a breast cancer survivor, and my sister-in-law died from breast cancer at 42, leaving a 2-year-old and 4-year-old. My sister is currently undergoing treatment for breast cancer," he said.

Several months ago, he put his sister in touch with C4R when she started chemotherapy.

"She said the day the company (in Chicago) came for her first cleaning was one of the most exciting in her life - she hadn't been able to change linens or wash dishes for weeks, and she was never so happy to see someone with a mop in her life!"

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## For women with cancer

Cleaning for a Reason is the clearing house for women with cancer who would like to request the free cleaning services, even those who live in the Santa Barbara area.

Here is the procedure to follow:

-- A doctor's note is required to complete your application. It can be faxed to C4R at 972-767-5198, e-mailed to [patientadvocate@cleaningforareason.org](mailto:patientadvocate@cleaningforareason.org) or mailed to Cleaning for a Reason, P.O. Box 146, Lewisville, TX 75067.

-- When the doctor's note is received, C4R will contact MasterCare to arrange service for you.

-- Once accepted into the program, you will receive one cleaning per month for four consecutive months. This is a general cleaning, not a deep cleaning or spring cleaning.

-- Each cleaning service volunteers its time. The employees are not volunteers and are paid for their work by the service owner.

-- If you are currently using a residential cleaning service, ask the owner if they are involved in the Cleaning for a Reason Foundation. If they are not, it's probably because they have never heard about C4R. Tell them about the Web site for more information.

For more information, call 877-337-3348 or go to [www.cleaningforareason.org](http://www.cleaningforareason.org).

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## On a personal level

Dee Carter Brown and Tami Finseth, two local women, related what it is like to receive free "benevolent cleanings" provided by MasterCare Home Cleaning Services while they were being treated for cancer.



Dee Carter Brown relaxes on the sofa with her dog, Finney, while Gloria Cruz, at left, and Margarita Martinez, "cleaning techs" from MasterCare Home Cleaning Services, make her home sparkle during one of four free cleanings provided by the Goleta company for women undergoing cancer treatments.

Ms. Brown, a fifth-grade teacher at Adams Elementary School, was diagnosed in August 2008 with breast cancer "the first day we were required to report back for in-service (teacher training), a week before students were in the classroom. Talk about a tough way to start the year.

"Surgery in September and October; six treatments of chemo started late October, and in late November, my right forearm suddenly swelled up with what all doctors believed to be malignant sarcoma. It was about this time, arm elevated and iced for a month waiting for surgery at UCLA, that I got in touch with MasterCare," she said in an e-mail to the News-Press.

"To call their generosity 'Godsent' is to belittle their sensitivity and professionalism. My husband and I have two young-adult daughters, a dog, a cat and a bird, so generating crud in our house is an all-too-well-practiced art.

"MasterCare first came in to clean the night before our older college-aged daughter returned from an abbreviated four-month study-abroad in Egypt (she was slated to study Arabic there for 10 months but felt compelled to return to the States early with my scary prognosis).

"MasterCare was like a SWAT team; three of them came in, delicately scrubbing around me, and my house has never been cleaner. When you're nauseous and hurting and hobbled, and on top of that, trapped in the house, having this team come in and scrub it spotlessly clean is enough to make you weep.

"Love me as much as they do, my family's challenged to keep the home front tidy on a day-to-day basis. MasterCare's house cleaning has allowed me to focus on my recovery and permitted my family to support me in easier and more meaningful ways."



Ms. Finseth has lived in Santa Barbara since 1985 and works as a loan officer at McAdams Financial Services.

"The Santa Barbara Cancer Center set me up with Spencer, and it has been a blessing beyond words," she wrote in an e-mail, referring to Spencer Dean, owner of MasterCare. "I am a single mother of two children (ages 13 and 14) at La Colina Junior High. I've been fighting cancer the last 31/2 years."

"I was diagnosed with Stage 4 NH (non-Hodgkin's) Lymphoma in August of 2005. My treatments and chemo over the last few years have left me tired, to say the least. It's tough enough being a single mom and not being sick.

"Having MasterCare come in and work their magic has just lifted a weight off my shoulders. It's been wonderful to have a clean house. Honestly, it lifts my mood, just like getting flowers or something. It renews my spirit. The teams of cleaners that have come to the house have been so kind, honest and thorough that I have also referred them to many friends. They do amazing work and in a very short time.

"It may not seem like that big of a deal, but it has been huge," she wrote. "I can't put into words what a blessing his (Spencer Dean) service has been. The last thing I have is the energy for cleaning. I really needed to focus on my children when I did feel well between treatments."

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