



There's No Place Like Home

AWARE SENIOR CARE PROVIDES OLDER ADULTS WITH IN-HOME SUPPORT.

// STORY BY BETH PETERSON



“WHEN YOU WALK IN THE DOOR AND THEY’RE glad to see you, that’s the best part,” says Shirley Robinson, one of the caregivers on staff at Aware Senior Care, in describing her job. “I love helping somebody else help themselves. ...You bring your heart and then you bring your smile. When I hit the door...I bring the positive.”

That’s the attitude everyone is dreaming to find. “If I could clone Shirley, I would,” Gina Murray, co-founder and director of Aware Senior Care, says to the small crowd seated cozily around the living room of Joyce and John Emerson’s home.

“If I could adopt her, I would,” John Emerson adds, beaming.

Shirley has already been here several hours on this drizzly late-March morning. A caregiver through Aware Senior Care since 2015, Shirley provides in-home assistance for Joyce Emerson, John’s wife of almost 70 years.

Several months ago, Joyce fell and broke her hip. As soon as Joyce returned home from the hospital, John assumed the role of primary caregiver, with help from their three daughters. Between Joyce’s recovery and keeping up with normal, day-to-day tasks, however, it soon became clear: More support was needed.

Along with her heart and her smile, Shirley brings the support that the Emerson family requires. She assists Joyce with everything from personal care to physical therapy exercises. She helps manage insulin care for both John and Joyce, and Shirley keeps on top of things like laundry and often preps dinners for the Emersons. “We love her cooking,” Joyce says of Shirley, more than once over the course of

the morning.

What’s more, Shirley keeps them laughing, sometimes making jokes at her own expense, just to see John or Joyce smile. John refers to Shirley as a “live wire,” adding, “She lights up the place when she comes in.”

“I miss them when I’m not with them,” Shirley affirms.

None of this interaction—none of this warmth—is by accident.

“This is personal to us; people deserve dignity,” Tim Murray says. As co-founder with his wife, Gina, Tim also serves as Aware Senior Care’s president. It was after he had experienced searching for care solutions for his mother that he and Gina began dreaming about building a company like Aware Senior Care.

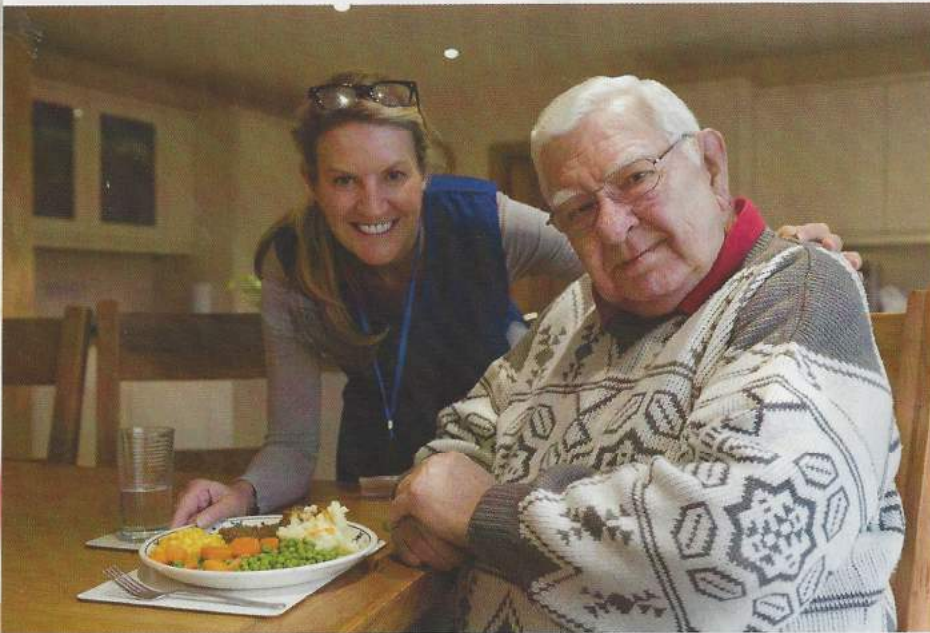
The couple felt called to provide an avenue for the type of care they wish Tim’s mother, Emily, had received toward the end of her life.

It’s obvious that Gina and Tim still keep Emily front-of-mind when interviewing potential caregivers. “We hire the most amazing people we can find. It’s not that there’s a shortage of caregivers; there’s a shortage of great caregivers,” Tim says, before sharing the following statistic: Less than 3 percent of all applicants to Aware Senior Care are actually hired.

Hiring the right person is only half of what makes Aware Senior Care different. He and Gina do everything in their power to make sure their caregivers feel cared for as well. As part of that effort, they never assign caregivers to clients based solely on availability, as other in-home care providers are known to do.



// AWARE SENIOR CARE HELPS SENIORS WITH EVERYDAY TASKS LIKE LAUNDRY, COOKING, AND CLEANING.



Gina conducts thorough assessments of both the caregiver and a potential client before she matches them up. To illustrate that point, Gina rattles off several of the assessment questions: "What are the [client's] goals? What are their desires? Do they want a chatty caregiver? Or, do they want someone a little quieter? Do the caregivers have pet allergies or fears?" With 30 years of experience in the nursing field to aid her, Gina sets her caregivers up for a rewarding career.

Tim and Gina recognize that assisted living facilities do have their place. But, remembering how Tim's mother longed for the feeling of being at home, they are passionate about enabling seniors to stay in their own homes as long as possible. They've seen it work wonders in the lives of the seniors they serve. "The will to live is very strong," Gina says, "It's amazing what people will achieve [in their own homes]."

Aware Senior Care, it's no surprise, is highly reviewed by the Cary community, and has received several "Best of the Best" awards for the services they provide.

Back in the Emersons' home, you'll find dozens of elephants scattered around the living room. Joyce has collected them—figurines, of course—for years. It's fun to imagine that each elephant stands for a different memory. Aside from their elephant collection, they've added three daughters, several grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. So much life has happened within the walls of this house in the 60 years the Emersons have lived here: This is home, and this is where Joyce belongs.



// AWARE SENIOR CARE HELPS SENIORS TO LIVE THEIR BEST LIFE AT HOME, SURROUNDED BY FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

“Isn't she pretty?” John asks of nobody in particular, looking at his wife. Perhaps he's seeing her, for a moment, the way he saw her in 1949. When Shirley is here, he simply gets to be Joyce's husband again. “Just look at that skin!” Shirley asserts. Joyce only smiles and whispers, “Thank you,” and it's obvious that the Murrays' vision for Aware Senior Care has been far exceeded by the reality in the Emersons' lives. ①



// CAREGIVERS ARE THOUGHTFULLY MATCHED WITH CLIENTS TO BE CERTAIN IT IS A GOOD FIT FOR ALL.

PHOTO BY GREG DAVENPORT