

## iHeartRadio's "CEOs to Know": Tim Talks with Kyle Wilson

Original Air Date: November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019



Tim joins host Kyle Wilson once again for iHeartRadio's "CEOs to Know" podcast. They discuss why Aware Senior Care was founded, the core principles of the business, and what Tim sees on the horizon for the company.

**Kyle Wilson:** Welcome to CEOs to Know. I'm Kyle Wilson. November is Alzheimer's Awareness Month and that's a relevant time to introduce our next guest in the series. He is Tim Murray, CEO and co-founder of Cary-based Aware Senior Care. Now, they provide award-winning in-home companion care, personal care, as well as nursing services to seniors and those who are disabled or chronically ill. Tim, thanks for coming in. Nice to see you again.

**Tim Murray:** It's great to see you too, Kyle.

**KW:** Last time Tim was in here, he was a guest on our [Around the Triangle](#) program that airs each Sunday. We talked about dementia last time. Caring for the elderly as older folks some developed cognitive difficulties. Today, we're going to focus a little bit more on Tim's business,

the services they offer, as well as the lessons learned as he's built the business. So, expanding on what I said, Tim, in the intro. **Tell me a little bit more about your business mission and vision.**

**TM:** Great. Yeah, Aware Senior Care. *Our mission is to provide unsurpassed home care for seniors. To bring peace of mind to those who care for seniors and to be an educational resource.* I think that's really important in home care and the issues faced by by seniors.

**KW:** And we talked about this a bit when I had you in for Around the Triangle.

**TM:** Right.

**KW:** This is a subject that you know a lot of us don't think about or don't know about until we have a parent who may require some assistance. **How did you get into this line of work? Why, why care services?**

**TM:** Yeah, that's a great question. Because my background for many years starting with the, remember last time we talked, United States Navy submariner, and then IBM and the technology and software through the years. Really, the catalyst is my wife Gina. She spent the better part of 27 years in her career in geriatric care.

**KW:** She's a nurse.

**TM:** She's a nurse and worked here in Raleigh starting in 1996 for [Mayview Convalescent Home](#) and skilled nursing. She was there for the better part of 10 years. And then went to [Transitions Life Care](#) and opened up a beautiful home, a hospice home on Trinity. So she's got the background. *But really Kyle what it was, was her own personal experience. It's very personal to us.*

Gina cared for her dad, Andy. Great man, participated in Manhattan Project as a army engineer, later for Lederle Labs. Died of a brain cancer back in 2006 and and Gina was his hospice. And for my own part, family, my stepdad. I cared for my stepdad who had dementia and suffered a stroke on that and then my mom. I don't remember we were talking about dementia last time we were on the show.

But my mom, suffering from dementia, lost a leg to diabetes. Went from a home and home care to assisted living here in Cary. So, really, it was my wife back in 2014 who said to me, "*I think we can do home care better. From what I've seen, our seniors deserve better. We can do this. I know we can do this.*" I said do some research and then God has a way of guiding you to where he would like you to go.

And my company, a technology company in Florida, CrossMatch was acquired and all of a sudden I picked that phone up calling from Florida and said let's do it. She said well let's do

what? We're gonna do our company. We got this long pause. When I come home we're gonna form our company. At the time, we did we didn't have our name.

**KW:** Sure.

**TM:** But, that event led to us forming Aware Senior Care in June and we had our first client in October (2014). Believe it or not, we're just about on our fifth year anniversary.

**KW:** Wow.

**TM:** So, we did it because we just felt compelled. We could help people because not only you know, you're in a business you know it. **But, it's different when you're living it and when we get in a conversation with a family, we can empathize what they're going through quickly and we go you know, we're going through it. And it's such a comfort to them that they can relate to us.**

And, and, that's really the art of this is getting people to understand we are listening and understand their needs and then solving their problem. Whether we provide it or with the help of our great community.



**KW:** Sure. You talk about community and you mentioned some of the the background that your wife had in care services. It must be a crowded marketplace. **What does Aware do to stand out?**

**TM:** That's a great question. I think if you pick up the [Resource for Seniors](#) manual, a great resource through our community and you look at the home care agencies. I think there's over 200 agencies in RTP alone. It may be even more it seems like every day. So, you would say well gee the market is saturated.

But, the need is growing and what I think differentiated us early on, it's obviously our personal experiences and connections and respect that really Gina brought to the market in Raleigh in knowing physicians and organizations. And that's grown because we've established a track

record and a reputation. *But what's made us unique is [we're educators](#). If you go to our website, we educate every week on some issue.*

Whether it's dementia, [dealing with resistance for home care](#), some innovative service. We educate. As people when they feel they've learned something they appreciate it and they remember you. Well we've established, we're sort of a one-stop shop. I know that may be an overused [phrase]. But really is true.

A resource in elder care where people call us and our philosophy is we, if we can help them, great. But, to help them, we sometimes refer them to a competitor of ours. Or we link them up with the food service like Chef for Seniors. So basically our mantra is to [solve their problem](#) and we get great joy whether we provide the service or not. So, what differentiates us is we, you remember that Verizon commercial with that little guy and he had the village behind him.

**KW:** Yeah.

**TM:** That's the image I want when people look at Aware Senior Care. We may be out in front. But behind us there's great people like the [Dementia Alliance of North Carolina](#), Transitions Life Care, Transitions Guiding Lights, Chefs for Seniors. Adult Day Care like Marcia Jerrell with [Sarah Care](#). We bring all that. It's like a village and we all work together. And I look at home care as a team sport. I think that differentiates us from, you get a call from another home care agency. Well, we can't provide service and thank you very much and they're done. **That's not us. We, we make sure all our staff, we help people.** Because downstream, it comes back to serve you well if you have that type of reputation. So I think that's a key differentiator of Aware Senior Care.



**KW:** And we're talking about taking care of the elderly. **What are some of the [services that Aware Senior Care provides](#)?**

**TM:** Well, it's great. You know people, a lot of people, like Kyle, we talked about don't even realize [what Home Care is](#). It just surprises me that people think of home health which is doctor-ordered. Where you're providing PT and OT and therapy. But, Home Care is non-medical. And it's mainly private pay. You know now that in statewide, now we're looking at Medicare, [Medicare Advantage](#) paying for some home care.

But, it's basically services that help people stay in their home, [live well in their home](#) and safely. And a caregiver, who are amazing people, are jack-of-all-trades. They could be a companion, reading, running some errands, taking somebody to church. Doing some light housekeeping, meal preparation.

That's called, commonly called [companion care](#) and we do that. But, then there's the personal care side where someone needs perhaps a little bit more help. Maybe they're bedridden due to a chronic illness and they don't, they don't want to go to assisted living or skilled nursing. Our caregivers can come in and do some, help them with feeding and bathing. Some of those more personal things.



**KW: How do you find caregivers?** Because these are very personal sensitive services that they're asked to provide sometimes.

**TM:** Yeah, that's the, that's the hard part. My wife Gina tells people and they say you know, home care, you know, what's your biggest challenge? And you think well, finding clients or any sales process. **But, honestly the challenge more is finding great people who feel and think and share that passion you do.** It's a little bit of a challenge finding clients because it's a crowded marketplace.

But, the premium is on finding caregivers. We work really hard at it. We have an orientation today. When I left, we had two [great caregivers](#) in. And we use [Indeed](#). It's a very popular, you know, many employers use it and I think it's how we project ourselves is we work hard at focusing on the caregiver and taking care of the caregiver. Our reputation. But that's the hardest part is finding those people and some of our caregivers have been with us for four years.

Ever since we started, which I think is a real tribute that we're really focusing taking care of them compensating them well and health benefits. But that's the biggest challenge if you talk to any owner out there is finding and retaining great caregivers.

**KW:** Okay, you mentioned the educational resources before you, on the web site. Let's take this opportunity to point out you can go to [AwareSeniorCare.com](#) and read all these things. You have a [great FAQ section](#) on there that is very educational. Again, for someone like me, I don't have elderly parents yet. But I'm thinking about it and in preparation for this interview, I spent quite a bit of time on your site. Kind of clicking around, doing some reading and it is eye-opening to realize what you don't know, what you don't think about. You know, what are some of the lessons that you learned back when you were first starting this business or when you and Gina were caring for your parents?

**TM:** Well, it's, you don't know what you don't know. It's like you, what this has been in these five years. It has been an incredible journey of learning. We learn every single day it seems like. We didn't realize some of the intricacies of home care you have to be kind of a counselor, a social worker. It's not just all tasks. [Families are in duress](#). So, we learned we've got to do a great job of listening and in going underneath the covers a little bit to see what's driving these issues.

And it's not, it's, every family's unique. And what we've learned again, [this is the village concept](#), is we get help from our friends when we see things like depression and so forth to provide good services in the home. So, never assume anything, you know? We just really, really do our research with every family to make sure we understand what the issues are to provide the right help we can.



**KW:** And when we're helping the elderly, keeping folks able to stay in their homes longer, that's got to be a big boost for their quality of life. **What are some other things that we can do to help the quality of life of elderly folks?**

**TM:** Well, it's great to stay in the home. But, we take [a holistic view](#) and having purpose is so important to life. Like getting out of bed in the morning. And so when we're working with families, we try to look at what they were doing previously to bring them joy to try to bring them back here with with help. Like I stopped going to church because I had this mobility issue. Well, can we get therapy, can we assist?

**KW:** How can we get you moving again?

**TM:** Exactly right. It's, we take, that's why our, you know, it's live well at home was kind of our, and it's not just here's your service and that's it. Write us our check. **We're concerned about their well-being and we talk to the family members. It's really a team effort with the family.** What brought mom joy before? You know, what can we do? Reading, games, getting out?

You know, so we, that's what it's part of what makes us unique and I think provide good home care is to you, you take a more holistic view. It's not just home care. You're looking at the entire person and to bring some joy. One client, we talked about her last time we were here. In Raleigh, we had five, for four years supposed to die in three months and it went four years.

**KW:** Oh wow.

**TM:** She was bedridden and you think: *How could, what joy does she have?* Well, she had a great spirit. Her bed was near a picture window in Raleigh. She could look out and see the flowers or the deer. And that gave her joy. Or sitting with us and watching a show. So, really, I think a secret part of home care is taking care of your client.

Spiritually, physically, it's holistically. And that's what, that's what gives us great joy. When we can transform a situation from loneliness to some goodness, providing some joy in this last stage of life.

**KW:** Aware Senior Care has all those educational opportunities to learn more about care services. AwareSeniorCare.com is where you can find all those. Do you [give back to the community](#) in any other ways? Charitable initiatives?

We are, it's part of our DNA. We just feel it's such a privilege to do we do. And as you know when you give, it gives back 10x. We are very active in the community. It starts, we're members of the Chamber of Commerce. Every year we do the Chamber of Commerce service day where we've gone out with my son and employees and installed grab bars and things and senior showers or light bulbs. Little thing, you would not believe what the joy we got. We were in Raleigh, went into a house and we were just changing light bulbs and she's hugging us. And I mean-

**KW:** Little things for just-

**TM:** Yeah, just those little things pay, pay you back. I'm a member of the [Cary-Kildaire Rotary Club](#). A wonderful group of people that share that spirit of community service and we get involved with all kinds of projects. Like, last weekend I went up to Fresh Farm (**Editor's note: [First Fruit Farm](#)**). There's a football player, Jason Brown, who has a farm and everything he grows is donated. You just need to pick it.



We came up to pick potatoes and donate it to the [Food Bank \(of North Carolina\)](#) and [Dorcas Ministries](#). And then we're involved with great organizations. Like you remember we talked about the Dementia Alliance of North Carolina. I'm a board member. I love being part of that board. They, Heather and the great people there are doing wonderful things.

Educating people about dementia, providing family support. And then we give to that organization and Transitions Life Care, Transitions Guiding Lights, the Food Bank, Dorcas Ministries. **Some people think I'm a little crazy for these donations. You're running a business and they may have a point. But, we just feel so good about doing that and it just fuels us. And we just love working with those people.** So we're very active.

Our week is pretty much full with softball two times a week and occasional board meetings. I'm a member of the Finance Committee for St. Michael's the Archangel. Sometimes I think maybe I should throttle back a little bit. **But we just love being immersed in our community.**

**KW:** You're a busy man. I'm in my 40s. My parents are in their 60s. So far, everyone cognitively is, is hanging in there. **What would your advice be for someone my age who's beginning now, my eyes are kind of open from our conversations, planning for the future? What would your advice be?**

**TM:** Plan carefully. Plan. You hit the key word, Kyle. Plan. Have a plan. That's what our website is an education resource and in the middle of the web site starts with I have no idea what home care is. Tell me about it. All the way through your journey at the end saying, I know what I want. Tell me how I can work with a home care agency. So, it's educating. In our blog, I advise people. Think seriously about [long-term care insurance](#).

**KW:** I was gonna ask you about that because that's again, something that when you're on the younger side of things you don't, you don't think about that.

**TM:** It's, it's amazing. I didn't really think about it. You know, I got a financial planner to help me mainly get my kids through college because I didn't have a clue how I was going to do that with four, four kids. And luckily, we live in a community that has NC State and Chapel Hill that are affordable, great universities. So, family went to State and so forth.

But, [you make a financial plan](#). But we don't make a plan for life. You know, how near the end of stages, what Gina and I have seen, you asked me a great question before, what have we seen? What have you learned? And one of the things is, wow. We, you really need to plan for taking you know, your elder care at the end because the culture's changed. Where in some cultures you know, the sons and the daughters take care of mom and dad and they move in and so forth. That's really not the culture now.

**KW:** Everybody's spread out. I think in terms of my family: Five kids, parents are in central Indiana. And the five of us are on all coasts spread out across the country.

**TM:** Right. And is it realistic, maybe one of you takes Mom and Dad in? Maybe.

**KW:** Maybe.

**TM:** But, here's the real question: *Do mom and dad want to be taken in? Gina and I don't want that.* We don't want to be the burden. I experienced growing up where my dad took my grandmother in the house and you know, collected her Social Security and put her up. It was very difficult on my mom. It was almost like competing with the kids.

So, with long-term care insurance, we actually last year put a, we got a policy and we took a, we planned a slice of our finances to go towards that. That if we become ill or we have dementia or something like that, we've got ourselves covered. And if it means going into a community, so be it. We've already given permission granted. In fact, we want to write a manifesto for our kids. It's okay if you don't know what's going on to take care of us because we planned for that.

So, my advice is when you're looking at your pie chart in life and you're looking at how I want to live my life and retire and travel. And you got insurance for if you die. How about insurance for [long-term care insurance](#)? And I wrote a blog about it, "Address the Elephant in the Room." And you should read it because it's got great advice from experts that I've consulted with and I think it'd be a good thing.

And you'll feel better that okay, I've made a plan. So, that's my advice. Make a plan and whatever. It may be just be saving some money knowing that that's going to go or-, either way. Plan for elder care and avoid being a burden on your kids.

**KW:** And you're not an insurance salesman.

**TM:** Oh no, I hate insurance (laughs).

**KW:** Well, you can take advantage of these [educational resources](#). AwareSeniorCare.com and again, check out the FAQ in the center section that Tim was telling us about. **What about advice for a young person or somebody else who may be starting up a business as a CEO? What are some lessons you've learned or your advice to someone as they start an entrepreneurial journey?**

**TM:** Yeah, kind of two things. I admire people who have some passion or vision and they go for it. Like we did in the business. I love talking to other owners of home care because they are amazing people with great heart who took a huge risk.

My advice is whatever your dream is for your business, to think about that business. What are the implications, financially and personally, if it fails or it takes a while to get revenue?

**KW:** Right.

**TM:** Every business takes a time period. Can you weather that storm? And when Gina and I started, we said okay. My company had merged, kind of had that little parachute. We had X months for profitability. Can we do it? And here's the key is talk to other successful people.

So, I went out and talked to some successful owners in home care that had been in it for 3 years, 5 years, 10 years and were successful. What did you do? What did you experience? And I love it because they'll tell you the truth.

They want to give back and help you and it's great to learn or be mentored by successful people. So, seek out people you trust that have maybe done something you did before, listen to them and the advice and then kind of put your plan together from there.

**KW:** You mentioned passion. **What are you passionate about in your free time?** Not that you have a lot of it from what it sounds like.

**TM:** That's a great question because balance in life is so important. Our grandchildren are a passion of ours. I never realized how cool it would be to be a grandpa. You know, I'm thinking I just turned 60 this year. It's ama-, I cannot believe I'm 60. I don't feel it or act it. But spending time with my grandchildren, when we started the agency, even before, we took every Wednesday. My son and wife Angela had Simon and at 6 months, we started taking Simon once a week to give them a break for dinner.

That's kept going for five years. They're two kids later. Now, we have Simon, Isaac, and Hope. And tomorrow is our day and we'll pick them, pick them up from day care and so forth. We'll go to the park. There's nothing fuels your spirit when you get a smile from your grandchildren when they run into your arms. It's just amazing.

It's like there's a fusion and besides that, a fascinating part of Aware Senior Care, you can read up on our blog but Gina joined up with a group and I don't know if you've ever heard of this, [Camp Gladiator](#), Kyle?

**KW:** Yeah, yeah.

**TM:** So, three times a week we're running around in a Harris Teeter parking lot with a sandbag on our shoulder and I'm thinking what the heck are we doing? But, we're pushing ourselves. We're trying to stay fit. We preach that to our clients about wellness. So, we're like well, let's practice that. And then this year our son Kyle got us into, I don't know if you know this organization called [Spartan](#).



**KW:** I've heard of that.

**TM:** Well, this year we completed the Trifecta, which is completing in one year: We did a sprint, which is three miles and 15 obstacles. A Super, which is eight miles and twenty obstacles. And then what's called the Beast which is, turned out for us was 14 miles and 35 obstacles in West Virginia. It took us almost seven hours. Gina and I did it together. Jumping over walls, carrying sand bags, buckets of sand, throwing spears.

**KW:** Good for you.

**TM:** And we survived. But, it just, it just gives a sense of accomplishment and pushing yourself. So, which and then the last part is we go on "Chill-cations" where we just go somewhere. Like every six weeks. Like, went down to Pinehurst one day and just stayed at a B&B and chilled out.

**KW:** I like that.

**TM:** One time, we stayed in Durham at the Loft to see Hamilton and we did a staycation weekend. So, we try to, we definitely need to balance it because home care at times can be very challenging and emotional. When you see a family suffering from dementia or passes away. So, we gotta practice what we call self-care and that's what we do. So, it's been great and I credit my wife with so much and she's the one who led the way and my son Kyle. But, there's nothing like that picture of the three of us completing a Beast up in West Virginia like we did in August, so.

**KW:** Fantastic.

**TM:** That's what we're up to.

**KW:** What is next for Aware Senior Care?

**TM:** That's a great question. I'm excited about our our future. We have lots of great ideas. I think what may happen is we may expand and it could include merging with one of our friends that do what we do to give us a little bit more firepower and depth. So, I've been looking at that and there are some people we really admire that think like us, feel like us. Maybe cover different areas of care like geriatric care management. So, I'm thinking about bringing more in-house, if you will.

**KW:** Sure.

**TM:** But, we'll still work with our, our village. And then the next part, we're expanding on is we, dementia. We're getting a lot of cases, that caseloads working up. So, we're investing in special training and education and this year we started working with the Dementia Alliance in the music and memory program. So, we're really gonna bring a focus on dementia care because unfortunately, it just continues to grow with our booming senior population. So, a lot of cool things that we're looking for in the future for Aware Senior Care.

**KW:** 2020 could be a big year for you. [AwareSeniorCare.com](https://www.AwareSeniorCare.com). You can learn more. Tim Murray, CEO thanks for coming in. I appreciate it.

**TM:** Thank you for having me, Kyle. I really appreciate what you do too as well.