



## Lewisville-based coalition offers women undergoing cancer treatment free housecleaning

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By J. LOUISE LARSON / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

When one of her customers began cancer treatments, Debbie Sardone offered to clean her house for free.

She had no idea what she was starting.

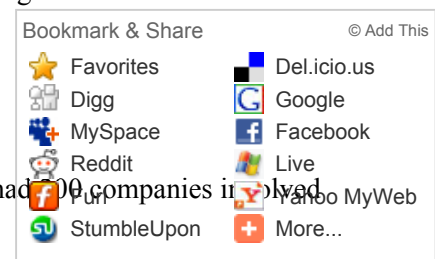
The result years later is Cleaning For A Reason, a Lewisville-based coalition of cleaning services across the country that helps women undergoing cancer treatment.

"I did this as a personal policy for women who had cancer, and I realized I was not the only one willing to do this, to give away what we do for a living," said Ms. Sardone, president and CEO of Buckets & Bows Maid Service Inc. in Lewisville. "Our industry already has this mind-set of helping people for a living.

"Why not give a few cleanings away to help someone?"

The idea caught on.

Within two months, she had 30 companies signed up. Within 12 months, she had 100 companies involved nationwide and filed for nonprofit status.



Cleaning For A Reason offers four free cleanings, one per month for four months. Women can fill out an application online – the only qualification is that they be undergoing treatment. Part of the application process includes a report from a physician.

Participating businesses are asked to do a minimum of two cleanings a month – more if they can afford it. So far, eight North Texas cleaning services have signed up to donate their services.

Ms. Sardone estimates Cleaning For A Reason has given away services worth a retail value of \$75,000 so far. Its motto: We'll focus on your house so you can focus on your health.

Dawn Pacheco of Lewisville has four children and home-schools three of them – no small feat when she's undergoing chemotherapy to arrest stage four breast cancer.

"With the chemo, all you want to do is come home and crawl into bed," she said.

Concerned that her time might be limited, Mrs. Pacheco said cleaning is even less of a priority.

"Nobody can predict the future – if you had a choice, would you spend your time with your kids or cleaning your house?" she asked.

Ms. Sardone's service, Buckets & Bows, has donated house cleanings to the Pachecos.

"It's such a relief knowing they come in and do that – as a mom, you take pride in your home, so it brightens your day and lifts your spirits. It's a wonderful, wonderful thing," Mrs. Pacheco said.

Philadelphia resident Rosie Bendler is undergoing treatment for breast cancer. After a mastectomy, she could barely lift her arms. That's when volunteers from Keep It Clean With Raylene stepped in to help.

"My husband is disabled, so he can only do so much," she said. "They dusted, vacuumed, cleaned the bathroom, cleaned the kitchen. ... They were wonderful and pleasant to work with, and they were able to pick up the slack.

"To me, it was a real blessing."

Ms. Sardone said it's easy to see why the foundation strikes a chord with women.

"Women feel the most responsible when their house doesn't look the way they want it to," she said. "They're just so thankful to have the help. They say, 'I don't mind when friends come over and watch the kids or bring a meal – but this is so personal.' "

Nansii Downer owns Partners in Grime, a cleaning service based in North Richland Hills. She donates cleaning services to at least two cancer patients a month.

"When you are going through treatments like that, the worst feeling for a woman is to feel like your home is out of control. If I can go and help a woman and clean her house, how blessed am I?" Ms. Downer said, tearing up. "It still makes me cry when I try to explain to someone why we do this."

Ms. Downer, who has lost women in her family to cancer, said people don't realize the effect the disease can have on personal routine.

"It's devastating for a family, and for a woman, it's personal when they can't take care of their family because they're too sick," she said. "I can't make their pain go away and I can't make their fear go away, but I can clean their house for them.

"Until a cure is found, I'll still be cleaning for them. It will honor my sister, my mom and my grandmother."

*J. Louise Larson is an Ennis freelance writer.*

#### TO LEARN MORE

Cleaning For A Reason will hold an open house from 5 to 8 p.m. Thursday at its office at 211 S. Stemmons Freeway, Suite G, in Lewisville.

"We want to meet people and get the word out. We're desperate for volunteers to do paperwork and in-office tasks, and we want maid services to call about it and get on board," founder Debbie Sardone said.

"The need and demand is tons higher than the number of maid services that have heard about it, so we're trying to get the word out."

The foundation also is seeking gift cards from Office Depot or Staples that can be used for office supplies. Mass Mutual is donating wine, cheese and gourmet chocolate for the event. To volunteer, call 877-337-3348. To learn about the foundation or apply for service, visit [www .cleaningforareason.org](http://www.cleaningforareason.org).