

Meet the *Members*

Cheryl *Alston*



How caring for her aging mother inspired Cheryl Alston to build a business

Like many Baby Boomers, Cheryl Alston, president of Family Management Services Inc. (FMS), was unaware of the needs of aging parents until the untimely death of her father in 1985. “My father died of a heart attack at the age of 68, leaving my mother, who referred to him as her ‘Rock of Gibraltar’ without any idea of how their household ran,” Alston says. “My father made all the decisions—my mother was completely dependent on him, and I realized our case was not unique. I knew there must be other women like my mother out there.”

Alston’s realization led her to found FMS, a business that aims to honor her father’s memory by helping older adults navigate the retirement experience. “I began by focusing on the specific needs my mother had in trying to adapt to being a widow at age 65,” Alston says. “Having worked for the Virginia Department of Social Services, I knew what kinds of services

were available for someone like my mother, which were not many.”

She then began visiting the numerous area agencies that assist seniors to ask personnel if they thought establishing a service which would help senior citizens to pay bills, navigate the Social Security System, and generally manage life in retirement was a viable idea. “I received a unanimous ‘YES’ from everyone I contacted,” Alston says. So, armed with a master’s degree in psychology and 15-years experience working for public agencies, Alston established FMS to tackle the challenges families with elderly parents face.

“We believe families need a trusted, competent service to guide them through the many complexities they encounter in caring for an aging loved one,” Alston says. “Our goal is

"I joined (Success in the City) and now **enjoy a refreshing new networking experience** with successful, fun and creative women." CHERYL ALSTON



to offer an array of services which provide guidance, support, and hands-on care for older adults while enabling their adult children to manage their care."

Today, after 23 years in business, FMS's scope has expanded well beyond its initial beginnings. "When I started FMS, I was on the cutting edge of what is now called geriatric-care management," Alston notes. "Today, FMS differs from other geriatric-care businesses because of the broad scope of services we provide."

Indeed, the litany of services FMS offers is impressive, from relocating seniors to retirement facilities to daily money management to crisis intervention and family counseling. "In essence, FMS is many businesses in one, meaning

families have a comprehensive service delivery to address the many needs that arise for aging adults," Alston says. "I am proud to say that, as far as I know, there is no other company like FMS."

However, even the unique nature of Alston's business does not mean it is without challenges. "As the CEO, I am responsible for all business operations including marketing to attract new business, motivating and directing employees, and client satisfaction," she says. "Like many small-business owners, I often feel pulled in many directions. Nonetheless, we continue to grow and solidify our reputation in the region."

Alston's primary goal is to continue to expand FMS, which currently serves northern Virginia, northwest Washington, DC, and Montgomery, Maryland. With this focus on future growth, Alston remains diligent in developing new type of marketing strategies.

In addition to Yellow Pages advertising, she also utilizes direct mail to agencies dealing with seniors and has expanded the company's Internet presence by hiring a company to extensively broker FMS online.

Alston also believes in the value of networking with other female business owners and joined Success in the City, a Washington, DC-based social-networking organization for CEO and senior-level executive businesswomen. "My secretary brought a *Washington Post* article to me featuring Success in the City," she says. "I went to their website and I was thrilled to see a group of women business owners and executives who believed in the concept of 'doing deals on heels'—it really captured my interest." by Julie Edwards





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