

BUSINESS

BUSINESS PULSE CHECK

Air for Life

By MADHVIKA SINGH
PHOTOS COURTESY OF
AIR FOR LIFE

This article is part of Business Pulse Check, a series where we at Tri-City Voice check in with a local business and how they have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and related closures.

Air for Life is a Fremont business that provides sleep-specific Durable Medical Equipment (DME) services such as the Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP), BiPAP (Bilevel Positive Airway Pressure), non-invasive ventilation and related accessories. Jonathan & Lynne Pecson opened their business in January 2019, and their inspiration came from personal experience when they saw family members suffering from severe snoring and sleep disturbances impacting their day-to-day life. Jonathan has five years of sleep medicine and DME experience and Lynne has almost a decade of experience in corporate management and healthcare administration.

Sleep Apnea is a disorder resulting from recurrent upper airway obstruction, causing blockage of the back of the throat during sleep. The cycle of apnea (obstruction) and awakening may repeat itself many times per night and this sleep fragmentation results in daytime sleepiness and impaired performance. In severe cases, it can be life threatening. Predisposing factors can include being male, hypothyroidism, and facial structures with narrowing of the upper airway. Sleep apnea can also run in families. The most common treatment for Sleep Apnea involves the use of machines such as CPAP and BiPAP that continuously apply air pressure into someone's airway to prevent

muscles from constricting and restricting airflow.

As with other businesses, COVID-19 related restrictions proved to be a challenge for Air for Life. A lot of their business came through referrals from sleep clinics and elective procedures that this year have been put on hold, dampening demand for services. "We had a drastic decrease of patients in March and April," shared Jonathan. A few weeks into the shutdown, the Pecsons realized that COVID-19 would change the way business is conducted, and they needed to adapt quickly. A good friend helped them get onto social media and reach out to the community of patients and experts. "We gained followers and reviews, which attracted more business," said Jonathan.

Meanwhile, they navigated regulations and new programs to seek help for their business and employees. "We realized the importance of having a well-structured business and trustworthy advice, because it made applying to several loan and grant programs simple and easy," added Jonathan. With the pandemic raging in New York at that time, Air for Life pitched in by donating to a group of UC Berkeley professors and students who made 1,000 ventilators to send to New York's COVID-19 hot spots.

Seeing the positive impact of outreach efforts on the web, the Pecsons decided to take their business online to a modern e-commerce platform. "I believe we need to implement latest technology and ways to stay in touch in order to thrive as our world evolves," says Jonathan. Along with expanding their business online, they have also made modifications to their physical business. They've added local delivery and drop-off options within Fremont and can ship out of state as well. They are now offering Facetime and Zoom calls to help



guide potential buyers who are looking for information. As an added convenience, customers can also reach them through a quick-text service.

On the personal front, the Pecsons feel fortunate to be in good health, but are missing quality time with their friends and extended family. On the other hand, they are able to spend more time with their two-year old daughter, and are learning to cook their favorite Vietnamese dishes.

Jonathan turns to motivational books for inspiration. "The Four Agreements: A practical guide to personal freedom" by Don Miguel Ruiz is among his favorites. The philosophy that keeps him going in the face of troubles is, in his words, "Don't sit around and wait for things to get better. Come up with a different plan, reach out to other business owners, speak with your employees and ask for their thoughts."

Tri-City Voice wishes Air For Life the very best as they help people get a restful night's sleep and wake up to a refreshing morning!

DISCLAIMER: The list of predisposing factors mentioned above is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.

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Raising Leaders helps students succeed

By MIRANDA JETTER

The same year Davida Scott, a teacher on special assignment at the Hayward Adult School, launched her first Raising Leaders workshop, one of her students, Karina Banta, was found dead. According to reports from Kron4 and SFGate the body of the Hayward 23-year-old was found in a pile of debris at the Altamont Landfill in Livermore on New Year's Eve. She was the sixth of Scott's students to die.

Banta is one of 19 students Scott has "lost" over the years—from murder charges to suicides to car accidents. "Ms. Davida," as her students like to call her, works with kids who live with challenging circumstances and sometimes suffer perilous consequences. Many of them are minorities or low-income or both. Their families are frequently undocumented and some of them have spent time in the juvenile justice or foster care systems.

Scott started Raising Leaders two and a half years ago to address the lack of resources and opportunities within these communities. She wanted to create a model specifically for youth in alternative education and Probation. The program offers skills-building workshops and internships. With the infusion of funds that Scott has raised during shelter in place, students from all over the county can participate.

Before the program became Raising Leaders, it was just one student who Scott managed to place on a work assignment at California State University, East Bay (CSUEB). That student became 50 students, and Scott realized how successful it could be to provide youth with hands-on training. In 2017 she approached the city of Hayward to propose a pilot program similar to what she'd done at CSUEB.

Now Raising Leaders encompasses not only the internship program but an eight-week workshop series every trimester as well. The program is meant to showcase careers and opportunities within Hayward, Scott said. Workshops focus on four life skill areas: interview and employability

skills, financial awareness, career exploration and educational opportunities. City staff like judges, nurses and firefighters share their career struggles and successes. At the end of the workshops students receive certificates signed by state legislators. Often, they are "the first in their families to be honored by a politician," said Scott.

Evelyn Ocasio, Director of the Hayward Adult School, said the program gives youth a place to be. "It makes a difference when students have somewhere to go in the evening, when they have somewhere to go on Saturdays." Hearing from city leaders who have found success "fills them with hope."

The internship program places youth in different departments throughout the city. These jobs are useful stepping stones to future careers, especially given the city has numerous jobs that don't require a college education, said Hayward City Manager Kelly McAdoo. One of Scott's students, Yahya, trained with the Deputy Sheriff Activities League (DSAL) Boxing program and lost 95 pounds to help him towards his goal of becoming a firefighter.

Come spring he is hoping to intern with the fire department through Raising Leaders.

Scott started transitioning workshops online when shelter in place began and realized that virtual sessions made it easier for her to reach more students. However, other aspects of the pandemic have left the community she works with reeling. Many of her students and their families are undocumented, which has made receiving unemployment benefits after pandemic lay-offs impossible. Also, many work in grocery stores, fast food restaurants and other frontline positions, leaving them vulnerable to the virus. Already four of her students' families have had COVID-19.

During the pandemic Scott has increased the capacity of Raising Leaders. In the last few months she has raised almost \$800,000 for the program. Scott reached out to District Two Supervisor Richard Valle last year to discuss the program and he said he was "immediately impressed." They shared a common goal—the same youth she was working with were the ones his office was concerned about. He asked how he could

help and they began a partnership where Valle would take on Raising Leaders as one of his youth initiatives while underwriting some of the cost of the program.

Valle looped in Alameda County Probation Chief Wendy Still. The program aligns with Probation's goal of keeping youth out of the juvenile system, Chief Still said. Still reached out to Scott and asked her if she would be interested in expanding the program county wide with Probation's support. Scott said she was shocked at this spontaneous show of support: "I asked her to repeat the question."

One of the program's numerous success stories is that of Maria. She became a mom young and raised her daughter while going to high school. This June, while suffering from Covid-19, and as her mother fought the virus while hooked up to a ventilator in the hospital, Maria became the first person in her family to receive her high school diploma. Scott said Maria's mom has since returned home from the hospital and is so proud of her.



Raising Leaders accepts a check from the office of District 2 Supervisor Richard Valle and from Alameda County Chief of Probation Wendy Still