

# Preferred HealthMate, Inc.

## Home Health Care With Feeling

By Steve Peacock

Imagine having a stake in perpetuating the success of a fourth-generation, family owned diamond business. Would it ever occur to you to possibly walk away from such a thriving venture? Could it be worth taking a risk by pursuing a new line of business in a completely different sector of industry? For Joel Markel, founder and president of Preferred HealthMate, Inc., which he purchased exactly 16 years ago, the answer to both questions is a definitive “yes.” In fact, the longer the business has remained in operation, the more it has continued to flourish as a viable company, he says. There is no secret to its success, however. The key has been to provide significantly higher quality service to people in critical need of home health care. This extraordinary level of service consistently has been recognized over the years “by local hospitals, assisted living facilities, attorneys, social workers and other people and organizations,” Markel points out. This reputation stems from the sincere and effortful provision of compassionate, professional home health care services. Simply put, the company motto, “Home Health Care with Feeling,” “accurately describes the care we provide,” Markel says. “Although for many years the concentration was on geriatric care, we soon thereafter became involved with caring for people with head injuries, spinal cord injuries and more severe diagnoses,” Markel says. “At that point, we became trusted not only by the community, but by major insurance companies in state and out of state, who brought us clients in need of care.”



**Preferred HealthMate's Brick office is located at 1999 Route 88. They can be reached at 800-603-CARE or by visiting [www.preferredhealthmate.com](http://www.preferredhealthmate.com).**

“As the agency now became very comfortable in doing skilled, clinical nursing care, we became one of the premier providers of care to children and geriatric clients with serious diagnoses, allowing for them to live at home rather than having to live at hospitals or nursing homes,” he adds. Being at home, Markel emphasizes, “is the greatest gift.” “The simplest of care that we provide is home health aide work for a minimum of three hours per day,” Markel says. But the company also provides live-in care seven days a week and even the provision of R.N.s or licensed practical nurses seven days a week. Additionally, Preferred HealthMate provides services beyond the home environment.

“We offer shopping for elderly people who cannot get out, transportation to doctors offices, weddings and we even accompany people who need help on cruises or any other kind of travel,” he says. “It’s about providing a better quality of life,” Markel adds. “People can still have lives outside of the home.” Jonathan Herman, Preferred HealthMate’s director of operations, recalls how the company took care of one particular client from grade school through college, and continues to serve her into adult life. Markel and Herman understand the importance of home health care, as both have personally experienced substandard services and have witnessed the impact of such inadequacies on multiple family members. “When I was about 35 years old, both my family and I were in crisis as a result of my sister and son being diagnosed with cancer within a few months of each other,” Markel says. In 1988, Markel’s sister, Helen, was diagnosed with malignant melanoma. Compounding the situation was the fact that her husband, Arthur, Herman’s father, had died of lymphoma in 1981. Markel and his wife, Stephanie, therefore took Helen and her two boys, Russell and Jonathan, then 16 and 12 respectively, into their home. Cancer entered into the family again in 1989 when Ryan Markel was born. Now they needed home health care providers for two severely ill family members. “We did not find what we were looking for,” Markel says. “We did not find what we needed emotionally and clinically from the agencies that were then in existence.” “Health care was not nearly as developed as it is today,” Herman adds. Helen died not long after Ryan’s birth. Ryan died the following year, at 10 months of age. These events eventually served as motivation to move beyond the family diamond trade, according to Markel.

Initially, Markel tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to start a support group for fathers who lost children. Unfortunately, he says he was unable to come up with any men for the endeavor. “I decided I wasn’t going to give up, but rather take my idea and broaden it into creating a better standard of delivering home health care to the community,” Markel says. “What was apparent to me at the time was that there were virtually no agencies doing both geriatric and pediatric care.” Additionally, he observed a serious shortage of trained nurses to take care of the critically ill. Soon after, Markel read in The New York Times classifieds about a health care services agency for sale. “Immediately I knew it was the path I wanted to take,” he says.



**Joel Markel, founder and president of Preferred HealthMate, Inc., works alongside his nephew, Jonathan Herman, director of operations.**

Markel will never forget the public responsiveness to his family's situation. For instance, at the time of Ryan's death, a foundation was created in his memory and in honor of Markel and his wife, Stephanie. That foundation, which lives on today, donates all of its monies toward the provision of medical care to the homeless in Philadelphia, Markel says. Consequently, Preferred HealthMate and its staff of dedicated employees "generously

donate time and money to some well-known and lesser known charities throughout the country, particularly through organizations that help seriously ill children such as the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Markel says. "We give a lot back to the community, as the community has given us so much," according to Herman. "I feel so blessed that these people who work for the company are caring enough to go beyond the call of duty and give of themselves beyond their paychecks," Markel adds. The company, with local offices in Brick and in Eatontown, now has a total of seven locations throughout New Jersey and one in Pennsylvania operating under the Preferred HealthMate corporate umbrella. For more information, call 800-603-CARE or visit [www.preferredhealthmate.com](http://www.preferredhealthmate.com).