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Central Bank Reference Rate	BUY ₡515.59 SELL ₡521.31
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Company Offers Home Care in Central Valley

By Tyler Pearce
Tico Times Staff | editorial@ticotimes.net

If you're in your golden years and need someone to help you into your wheelchair, check your blood pressure, remind you to take your medication or just help out around the house, you'll be happy to know Costa Rica recently welcomed a branch of an established U.S. company offering these services.

From home nursing services and personal hygienic care, to assistance with grocery shopping and laundry, Homewatch Caregivers Costa Rica now offers these and other services from its headquarters in the western suburb of Santa Ana.

The 27-year-old international company opened its first Latin American branch here in early January, and boasts a friendly, trained staff of 20.

The company's trained employees will go to your home – or a parent's or other relative's home – to check vital signs, assist in ostomy care and help with mobility equipment hourly, for part of the day or as long as is needed, according to the company's Web site (www.homewatchcaregivers.com/costarica).

The service is geared toward people with disabilities, those afflicted with diseases such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and incontinence, and elders who live at home recovering from an illness or medical procedure.

The staff is completely bilingual and nearly all Costa Rican, though Managing Director Luis Diego Osborne said he expects the staff to level out at half Tico and half Gringo as the company grows.

While many staff members are certified nurses, Homewatch Caregivers does not require all employees to be certified if the service doesn't require it.

The staff "must have whatever certification is necessary for the delivery of their service," said Osborne during a recent visit by The Tico Times. "For example, for a patient needing insulin, only (certified) nurses will be sent to give it."

Clients are paired with a staff member who suits both their needs and personality, he said.

For potential clients concerned about the safety and expertise of the staffers, Osborne explained a comprehensive "Triple Screen Test" is mandated for all potential employees. The test takes into account character and experience, and includes a criminal background check.

Computers to Home Care

Osborne, an investor and former manager of IBM of Costa Rica, saw potential in bringing Homewatch Caregivers to Costa Rica when Leann Reynolds,



Helping Hand: A franchise of U.S.-based Homewatch Caregivers recently opened in Costa Rica to provide assistance for people with medical needs in the comfort of their own homes.

Photo courtesy of Homewatch Caregivers



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president of Homewatch International, proposed it to him at a meeting in the U.S. capital, Washington D.C. He acted quickly, buying a franchise in October 2006 and opening the Santa Ana office just three months later.

Costa Rica “is the most mature country in this area in regards to health services and professionalism,” Osborne said. Reynolds, who recently visited the country for the office’s official inauguration March 22, pointed to the country’s stability and recent growth in the medical tourism sector.

Despite coming off a year of stagnant tourism numbers, medical tourism, the phenomenon of flying to other countries to receive lower-cost medical care, is on the rise in Costa Rica. The industry has seen significant growth in the areas of cosmetic surgery (TT, Feb. 2) and, along with educational tourism, is an area that shows great potential for the country, according to the Costa Rican Association of Tourism Professionals (TT, Jan.12).

Starting Out

Having been open for just over three months, Homewatch Caregivers has so far attracted only U.S. patients. Osborne attributes this not to a lack of interest or inability of Ticos to pay, but more to a lack of knowledge about this type of service.

Expatriates living here “understand perfectly our services,” Osborne said. Costa Rica’s close-knit, family-oriented culture, on the other hand, traditionally hasn’t sought help caring for ill or elder relatives outside the immediate family.

With accessible prices and targeted advertising, Osborne said he expects the company to attract more Tico senior citizens, which are estimated to comprise nearly 10% of the country’s population of more than 4 million, according to the National Statistic and Census Institute (INEC).

“We try to apply services and charges to the reality of Costa Rica ...we have very competitive rates. They are lower when you compare them to (the prices of) the United States and Canada,” he said.

Fees are determined on a case-by-case basis, during a free assessment, but tend to range from \$4-10 per hour.

Service is presently offered only in the country’s Central Valley, though Osborne hopes to eventually open more sites in other areas of major development, including the northwestern province of Guanacaste and the central Pacific port city of Puntarenas.

Osborne has also set his sights beyond Costa Rica.

“We have bought the rights to all of Central America...we are looking to open an office in Panama by the end of the year and a third in Guatemala and later in the Dominican Republic,” Osborne said.

With the growth, however, Osborne and Reynolds both underscore education and proper advertising to ensure success.

Homewatch, which began modestly in the western U.S. state of Colorado in 1980 with just a handful of clients, has since seen substantial growth. The new Costa Rica branch brings the company’s international site total to five, alongside those in Japan, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

For more information about available services and rates, contact Homewatch Caregivers’ Santa Ana office at 201-5265 or e-mail melissa.alvarado@hwcentralamerica.com.

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