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BY BETH LUBERECKI | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A Little Help

Entrepreneur seizes on an unmet need in senior health care, with a get-to-yes attitude.

When Kerri Johnson located her biological father in 2017, it was a personal milestone. It also served as inspiration for a new business venture for the longtime nurse and medical salesperson.

“He had advanced dementia at that point,” says Johnson, 53. “It was kind of a lightbulb moment: He was living alone and had the means to travel, but he wasn’t able to travel on his own. This thought came upon me that he was not the only one in this situation.”

Johnson had traveled extensively during her career in medical sales, and she remembers frequently seeing elderly folks having difficulty with various aspects of airline travel. “It always broke my heart,” she says. “So when this all kind of came together, it made sense for me to say, ‘Why don’t I help people to travel?’”

In 2019, Johnson launched her new company, GOMO Travel. The Cape Coral-based company provides travel companions for seniors who need to travel for medical care, family commitments or simply a leisure trip. Assistance is also

available for unaccompanied minors and other child travel needs. Costs for the company’s services vary, depending on such factors as the distance traveled, the prices of airline flights and hotel stays, and the amount of time a travel companion is needed.

The name is a play on the expression FOMO (fear of missing out) and also aims to encourage people to “go more.” “I thought, why should seniors feel FOMO?” Johnson says. “Why should they not be able to participate in the pleasures of life that we all want to participate in?”

The growing company has benefited from a relationship Johnson established early on with the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. She made a presentation there in fall 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. And despite the global health crisis, many people have still needed to travel for vital medical care.

“When the pandemic hit, they still had a critical need for patients to be able to get to Rochester,” she says. “They started sending patients to us to help get them there. We were able to grow our business in 2020 despite the shut down on travel, so I feel really blessed and fortunate to have that relationship with the Mayo Clinic.”

Johnson expects even more growth in the future now that leisure travel is picking back up. That means more weddings, family reunions and bucket-list trips. “I would say generally we’ve had triple-digit growth each year since 2019,” says Johnson, who declines to share specific revenue figures. “We already met our last year’s revenue in June of this year, so we’re excited about that. And with leisure travel coming back, we only expect to have further growth.”

Earlier this year, Johnson moved the business from Jacksonville to Cape Coral. “It was an opportunity to establish a presence in that Tampa-to-Naples corridor with its really attractive demographics,” she



COURTESY PHOTOS
GOMO Travel, founded by **KERRI JOHNSON**, helped a client whose husband recently died get from Florida to New Jersey.

says. “The mature population, the transient population in and out — we really wanted to maximize our opportunities, and what better place to do that than Southwest Florida?”

GOMO travel currently has 15 employees, a figure Johnson sees growing down the road. “We would like to have travel companions in all the major cities, so that is part of our expansion vision,” she says. “Right now, most of our travel companions are east of the Mississippi, but we are expanding into the west coast as well.”

Johnson has self-funded the company so far, and she plans to continue bootstrapping it. “But we’re open to opportunities,” she says. “What that looks like, I don’t know. But we are certainly open to whatever



it takes to normalize assisted travel for seniors. Our vision is for everyone to be free to travel on their own terms.”

To keep growing the business, Johnson is working to develop additional relationships along the lines of the one the company has with the Mayo Clinic. One example: GOMO Travel recently forged a new partnership with Oasis Senior Advisors, a Bonita Springs-based company that helps families select senior housing options, to help its clients with relocation needs.

One key lesson early on is that success breeds more success. “It’s really about executing on what we say that we do, and we’re very proud of that,” Johnson says. “We take every referral personally, and we make sure that the needs of that traveler are heard. As long as we can execute on what we say we offer, then we find that we have a fantastic working relationship going forward.”

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