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Winter 2010/2011

THE MAGAZINE FOR NEW CASTLE AND BEYOND

# CHAPPAQUA

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# How Bal Agrawal's Life "Worx" & How He Can Add Peace and Calm to Yours

By Jean Sheff • Photos by Marianne Campolongo

Near the intersection of Routes 117 and 120, just opposite the New Castle Firehouse, sits a stately brick building. Perched above the fray, those inside can watch as daily life whizzes by in Chappaqua.

The building is occupied by LifeWorx, a firm established six years ago by Bal Agrawal, a former Fortune 500 executive who has come to realize the sanctity of "home." The offices are clean and sleek. Only a half wall separates employees, who appear to enjoy the transparency of the layout. The space is a perfect mix of business meets life. There's a well-appointed kitchen, a white couch and white side-chairs, life-size white boards for meetings and walls lined with modern portraits by Venture Photography. Touches of black and brown ground the 1,000-square-foot space and healthy granola bars fill a silver serving-dish. The atmosphere is calm and organized.

## What Came Before

Bal, 60, who was born in India, has spent more than half his life in the States. Meeting him, one is set immediately at ease. It would be hard to imagine his life as anything but streamlined and orderly. Yet this erudite gentleman, who has a Ph.D. (from M.I.T.) in material science, has seen his share of upheaval.

Bal says he was "somewhat naïve" when he fell in love with a young woman in India, who presented what he calls a "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" situation. Bal was raised in a traditional Hindu family and Candida was a Catholic Portuguese girl. The only way he could see the relationship working was to come to America. So, he applied to an American col-



lege and left India when he was accepted. They set up home in Michigan, which wound up to be a poor choice, and crisscrossed the country studying, living or working before finally settling with their young son Neel, in Briarcliff.

Bal was enjoying his work at Praxair, Inc. when his wife took ill. She was diagnosed with breast cancer and after fighting for two years she succumbed to the illness at age 42. Bal remembers coming home from one of their first medical appointments. "It was autumn. There was a beautiful moon out and I could see the leaves falling slowly to the ground just as our tears fell like raindrops down our face," he says.

Not everyone can express their feelings as poetically and naturally as Bal. Even a cynic would find it difficult to take him to task. After only a few minutes it becomes clear that his expressiveness is a large part of his being. That's not to say he is always serious. He has a lively smile and a hearty laugh. He enjoys his fun as much as he enjoys his work. "At the end of a stressful week, I look forward to my Saturday workout, a yoga

class, maybe a massage, a good lunch, and then I am back to new." Although he doesn't claim to be religious, if pushed, he does admit to being somewhat spiritual. Those who work with him are more forthcoming. Brian Martin, director of client relations for LifeWorx, readily uses the word spiritual to describe his boss.

## Other Challenges

Losing a beloved spouse is one thing. Picking up the pieces is quite another, especially when a child is involved. Neel was 11 when his mother was first diagnosed. He lived with her illness through his tweens and entered his teenage years without her. Bal makes it clear that Candida was a caring woman who not only worked as an administrator for Ossining's Open Door, but also established a home that was a haven to her husband and son.

Bal clearly appreciates the value women bring both to the home and to the workforce. He shared his passionate views on the subject recently when he gave a talk at the Women's Empowerment Conference at the Hyatt Regency in Greenwich.

In many ways, the seeds of LifeWorx were planted as Bal tried to deal with his shattered life after his wife's death. "My son was in bed depressed, the roof was leaking, my household help had just stolen the silverware and left," he says. He knew he needed help, but didn't know where to turn. Eventually he found a wonderful new household assistant but the thought that there wasn't a centralized organization which could disseminate this information quickly and professionally would stay with him.

Neel, who is now 30, eventually moved west to attend the University of Southern California. While there, he became increasingly ill and required several hospitalizations. "It's something I wasn't comfortable talking about before, but now I can say that my son suffers from mental illness," says Bal. It was at this time that Bal says he hit bottom. "It was like a one-two punch," he says. Yet, it was also the time when Bal, who doesn't belabor the point, says he felt "the presence of God and faith."

### Rebuilding

Bal brought Neel home, moved to Chappaqua and began the task of remodeling his new home and rebuilding his life. "It was the first time I had done any work like this," says Bal, who became a regular Home Depot shopper. It's clear that the work of creating a home appealed to him.

It was also the time to make a bold move. "I had a wonderful job, but I had always wanted to develop my own business," he says. He took about six months to develop his thoughts and then committed himself to the challenge of building LifeWorx.

He opened the doors in 2004, and when a positive article in The New York Times ran in January of 2005, the phone started ringing and hasn't stopped. At first, the firm focused primarily on pet care together with chef and organizing services. In dealing with clients, Bal found that once he got to the core of their issue, there were other services they really needed. Streamlining lifestyles by incorporating the right assistance in the home developed into a focus. Bal says he's pleased that so many of his clients say, "You get it! You understand my issues and the challenges."

Bal and his team (he has four employees in the Chappaqua location and two in a new location in



Westport) have expanded to provide nannies, childcare, eldercare, personal assistants and housekeeping experts. "We see ourselves as a solution provider rather than a staff provider," he says. At any given time, they have about 100 "experts" who can be assigned to a client's need within 24 to 48 hours. Yet, Lifeworx does more than assign - they make matches.

### Quality

Martin, who has been in the hospitality and service industry since his teens, says Bal runs a "top notch organization." There are "reports, accountability and weekly meetings," he says. LifeWorx takes what's best from the corporate world, adds high-end customer service and superior experts to solve the daily challenges many households face. Martin says that while the staff is extremely professional, they are also down to earth. "We are not robots; we are people and encourage clients to just talk to us so we can understand their needs and help solve them," Martin says.

LifeWorx has an extensive interview process. Barbara Bogart of Harrison is a LifeWorx eldercare expert. She's worked with the company for four years and respects their procedures. "All experts are screened, go through a full background check and a

detailed personal interview," she says. LifeWorx seeks to know everything about an expert's skills. Can they swim? Do they know CPR? So, should you want a housekeeping expert who can clean limestone, decant wine and tend an herb garden, they can supply you with the right person.

When Chappaqua resident Sherry Blockinger needed childcare for her daughter, she turned to LifeWorx to help her find just the right person. "They made it easy for me by taking a lot of the background work out of the equation, which gave me great peace of mind. They understood my needs, offered support and provided the help when I needed it," she says.

LifeWorx sets their standards very high. "We never send someone out there with our fingers crossed," Martin says. Their due diligence is a huge part of their success. "Our success rate is huge," says Martin.

### Serenity

Bal says his home can run on autopilot and that gives him a sense of ease and calm. It also gives him the time and energy to do what he needs and wants to do. He cooks about four hours a week and works to live a balanced lifestyle. "Health is such a gift," he says. He's been a devoted yoga student for the past five years. He brings his personal quest for a peaceful home to work with him everyday. "Life can be stressful, helping people create a functioning home that can be their respite is very rewarding," he says. As for his own respite, Bal hopes to walk across America with his son and his girlfriend within the next five years.

*Jean Sheff is a Chappaqua resident who would love to have a peaceful, organized home.*