

Know Your Neighbors: Meet Nikhil Mehta, a Business Veteran and Desert Newcomer Who Wants to Make a Difference

Written by [Anita Rufus](#)



Kavita and Nikhil Mehta.

Imagine coming to the desert to start a new small business, put down roots and make a mark—with no existing ties to the community.

That is the story of Nikhil Mehta, a native of New Delhi, India, who relocated to Rancho Mirage last year to start Home Care Assistance, supplying trained caregivers who offer innovative approaches—so badly needed in this aging retirement community.

Mehta, 59, came to the United States at age 24 with his wife, Kavita. They went to college together in India, and although she then came to the U.S. with her parents, she returned to India, where she and Nikhil married 35 years ago. Mehta attended the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and graduated with a master's degree in business. He and Kavita have two children: Arjun, 32, living in Los Angeles, and Jaya, 29, in residency at the Mayo Clinic in Phoenix.

Mehta's long and successful career includes 15 years at Xerox, where he was the vice president of finance for North America; he also had a stint at Citibank.

"I didn't enjoy the banking culture," he notes.

In 2000, Mehta moved to San Diego to be the chief financial officer of a biotech company. "We grew human skin for injuries," says Mehta.

“After Sept. 11, we sent a whole planeload of tissue out for victims of burns.”

Mehta moved back to Los Angeles and joined a company as a vice president for corporate development, and later took positions as a chief financial officer and chief executive officer at a company in Ventura.

After riding out the Great Recession, he decided he needed to make a change.

“It just wasn’t a joy anymore,” says Mehta. “I got burned out. I was looking to do something on my own, specifically in the health-care industry, which had always resonated with me. In the corporate world, you’re not your own person. You have to answer to a board and shareholders. I wanted to be in a situation where I was my own boss.”

In 2014, Mehta began exploring small-business opportunities. “I asked a franchiser to show me some businesses in health care-related fields,” he says. “They presented a franchise with Health Care Assistance, so I went to Palo Alto and was blown away. I’ve been in many companies, large and small, and I know how to judge management talent. I was impressed.”

Mehta began to investigate the whole industry. “I realized that as society is growing older, especially with baby boomers retiring, this industry has only one way to go—up. So many people need this support, especially since 90 percent want to grow old in their own homes.”

He initially hoped to open a location in the western portion of the Los Angeles area. “I was so impressed with their business model. I told them I could help them expand their growth and raise money. They may have thought I was crazy,” he says.

The franchise company decided to keep that location under corporate ownership, but they offered Mehta the Palm Springs area.

“I felt so passionate about how we can help through this business that I decided to move away from the coast and come to the desert,” says Mehta. “This business approach goes so far beyond industry standards; I believe we are really unique in what we offer.”

How do you move to an area where you have no real contacts and start a new small business?

“It’s been a challenge,” says Mehta. “Gaining acceptance when you’re new to an area is tough. The Coachella Valley is very self-contained, especially in the health-care industry. Everybody knows everybody else. It takes time. I had one potential contract turned down with: ‘If you last a couple of years, we’ll take you seriously.’ It’s also hard finding good talent locally, and we won’t hire anybody without at least two to three years of experience. Then we put them through a training program so they can deliver our service professionally. Our standards are very high.”

With many established caregiving agencies already in the Coachella Valley, what does Mehta think sets Home Care Assistance apart? “We offer more than just routine caregiving,” says Mehta. “We have a cognitive therapeutic method that includes physical activities and brain-exercise routines that can actually re-establish brain connections and are designed to delay the onset of dementia or slow down cognitive decline.

“Caregivers work one-on-one in clients’ homes with a series of activities that go beyond just memory-training. We also focus on the executive functions of the brain relating to language, attention and visual/spatial perception.”

Despite high hopes for his business, Mehta sees challenges here in the Coachella Valley.

“I’m glad to see that there is now four-year higher education available locally,” he says. “Once this area is recognized for providing that kind of opportunity, more people will come here and want to stay when they finish school.

“From a business perspective, we need more investment in specialized training. The Coachella Valley is definitely growing, so we need to provide incentives for more businesses to locate here—and that requires having an educated and trained labor force.”

Like any new small businessperson, Nikhil Mehta is reaching out through chambers of commerce and social events to establish local connections to others in the local health-care community.

“It takes time and effort,” he says, “but it’s worth it for something you believe in. We’ve seen tremendous lifestyle improvements in our clients. Besides, our methods make it fun for the caregiver and the client.”

Nikhil Mehta is just one example of the talent and experience we have here in the Coachella Valley. We need to attract more people like him—people who are willing to make an investment in making a difference.

Anita Rufus is also known as “The Lovable Liberal,” and her radio show airs Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on KNews Radio 94.3 FM. Email her at Anita@LovableLiberal.com. Know Your Neighbors appears every other Wednesday.