If you have ever had to buy fresh herbs to execute the demands of a recipe, chances are pretty good that you’ve bought a brand named Patty’s Herbs. Patty Johnson is a real person, and in fact, she lives in the illustrious Independence Hill Retirement Community. Patty’s Herbs, headquartered out of Pearsall, Texas, about an hour south of San Antonio, grew out of Johnson’s one desire: to put good-tasting nutritious food on the table for her family. “It all started with one pot of tarragon,” she chuckles. But from there, it grew. She started growing more varieties of herbs and using them in her recipes. An idea germinated, though, and she approached a local grocery store about selling her herbs to their customers. They loved the idea, and before long, they recommended she talk to H-E-B, the largest grocery chain in Texas. Today, Patty’s Herbs’ customers include H-E-B and other retail grocers like Green Fields Market in Stone Oak, produce distributors, large food distributors and food processors. The company product line includes 18 varieties of fresh culinary herbs and edible flowers, which are available year-round. Johnson realized there was a real need for the fresh herbs she supplied, so she took three acres in her backyard and cultivated them. As the business grew, so did the need for more land not only for growing, but also for packaging and office space. Johnson and her son bought 20 acres, and today, Patty’s Herbs runs successfully from their packing plant. Johnson speaks fondly of her employees, some of whom have been with her since the beginning. “They are my seasoned workers – no pun intended!” Thanksgiving is their busiest time, with sage being the biggest seller. “It makes sense,” Johnson says. “Sage is a great seasoning for poultry. So we started making a blend of rosemary, sage and thyme called Poultry Seasoning to sell at Thanksgiving.” Before Johnson retired and moved to Independence Hill, she offered herb tours to interested parties. It amazed her that most people knew very little about herbs and edible flowers at that time. Although most of the flowers are used as garnish, Johnson herself has made rose-geranium cake. “Hosting the herb tours was very satisfying,” she says. “It was a great way to educate people on the uses of fresh herbs and why fresh trumps dried every time.” Patty’s Herbs has garnered such a great reputation that international chefs buy and use Johnson’s herbs. From famous hotels and resorts around the world to right here in San Antonio, executive chefs using Patty’s Herbs know they are getting the highest-quality herbs. “My herbs have been used in meals prepared for President Bush and the pope when he visited San Antonio,” John son says proudly. Today, Johnson relishes her retirement. After being on the go with Patty’s Herbs since 1982, she says it was time to hand the business off to someone else and relax. “Charles, my son, now looks after the day-to-day running of Patty’s Herbs,” she explains. “It gives me time to enjoy reading (she confesses she loves murder mystery books), knitting and spending time with my cats.” She has three gorgeous cats that love to laze in the sunbeams that gleam through the windows of her home. Although she handed the reins of the business to her son, Charles, three or four years ago, she only recently came to San Antonio, moving in September 2012. She chose Independence Hill Retirement Community because of its easy accessibility to great shopping, to medical facilities and to her son and daughter-in-law and their children. She loves the quiet pace of life Independence Hill offers, as well as the wide range of activities she can choose to participate in. “I can do as much or as little as I want in a day,” she says. Being a discerning chef, she wondered how Independence Hill would shape up in the cuisine department. She was pleasantly surprised. “The cooks prepare food for an enormous quantity of people on a daily basis, and they do it really well!” When asked whether she thinks Independence Hill uses her herbs for their day-to-day meal preparation, she laughs. “I hope so, but I’m not about to ask!” Having turned what was once just a hobby into a true success story, Johnson has much to be proud of. She managed to run a good business while raising a family—and she did both successfully. –––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––

Independence Hill Retirement Resort Community at Stone Oak is located at 20450 Huebner Road. For more information on Independence Hill, please call 210-782-9892 or visit www.independencehill.com.