

In Topsham

ELM STREET ASSISTED LIVING



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JILL WALLACE

JILL WALLACE is the owner of Elm Street Assisted Living in Topsham. According to Wallace, the residents get individualized attention as they come together to share their stories, wisdom and experience. In turn, they receive comfort, reassurance and companionship that becomes increasingly more important at this stage in their lives.

A place with loving hearts and helping hands

At Elm Street Assisted Living in Topsham, the sense of family is wonderfully apparent the moment you walk through the red door.

A tabby cat ambles into the spacious front room where books are piled on a table next to a wing-back chair, a vase of fresh flowers decorates the



**Karen
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MAKING CHANGE

mantel, and delicious aromas, reminiscent of Sunday dinner at grandma's house, waft from the big kitchen where everyone comes

together at mealtimes. The historic home has private rooms for six residents, a living room for gatherings, and a beautifully landscaped yard and deck.

Within these walls are loving hearts and helping hands caring for elderly women in a comforting home-setting. The staff, consisting of owner Jill Wallace and her five employees, delights in their small size and in their uniqueness. For here, in the company of women, daily life is shared, and each person is truly known for who they are and what really matters to them.

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AT THE PRESENT TIME, there are openings at Elm Street Assisted Living for new residents. Jill Wallace can be contacted at 725-1134 or at jill@elmstassistedliving.com.

MORE INFORMATION can be found on the web at www.elmstassistedliving.com.

Wallace's background as a social worker, as well as her years of experience at the helm of the area's Hospice, gave her the vision of caring for elders in her own home. She wanted to provide the kind of care to others that she had been able to give to her own mother at the end of her life. When she opened Elm Street Assisted Living in 2003, Wallace strived to make it the kind of place where her own mother wanted to be, a place where the main components were compassion, kindness and safety, and where individuals could come together with all their eccentricities and differences and be accepted for who they are.

Wallace has taken her original vision and tweaked it over the years according to the needs of each resident who has passed through the doors. She provides a family environment that offers 24/7 staffing, housekeeping services, home-cooked meals, personal care, medication management, exercise programs, activities tailored to individual interests, transportation, and, ultimately, Hospice

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PREPARING TO GO OUT for a walk at the Cook's Corner Mall in January are, from left, Elm Street Assisted Living staff member Pam Fortin with Betty, Louise and Phyllis. Fortin said, "Everything is tailored to what the need is and what each individual wants to do."

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Jill Wallace, owner Elm Street Assisted Living

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care.

But more important than all those services is the fact that because of Elm Street’s small size and staffing stability, Wallace, who lives on the premises, has been able to build an atmosphere of trust amongst the members of her “family.”

She pointed out, “Elders need a lot more than ‘assistance.’ They need the kind of personal attention and emotional support that makes them feel loved and safe. Because our environment here is so small, we have the time to get to really ‘know’ them.”

Wallace also explained that later in life, because of conditions such as hearing loss, memory loss, confusion, or just not having the ability to reach out to others, the elderly can become increasingly isolated. Sometimes all it takes is having a caring, patient person close at hand who is skilled at facilitating conversation with a warm smile, a tender touch, and a few reassuring words.

At Elm Street Assisted Living, residents feel validated, valued and included. Wallace explained, “Even if someone is being cantankerous or has drama, it’s all OK. We give everyone here the space to totally be themselves. Everyone’s differences bring spice and interest to the group.”

Pam Fortin, a staff member for four years who also serves as activities coordinator, agrees.

“Consistency is key, but it’s also important to be flexible,” she said. “Everything is tai-

lored to what the need is and what each individual wants to do.”

Fortin enjoys taking “the ladies” on drives to view the coastline, out to lunch, and to see animals at area farms. The vivacious and fun-loving caregiver also arranges games and exercise, gatherings for families and friends, and invites in local musicians.

“I sell something no one really wants,” said Wallace, explaining how difficult it can be to have a conversation, or even think about, the need for end-of-life care. However, Elm Street Assisted Living isn’t always the end of the road for its residents. Some ladies have been fortunate enough to experience improved health while there, then moved on to independent living facilities.

One of the residents, Louise Gardiner, can attest to the level of care she receives at Elm Street. Now her home for more than four years, Gardiner, 92, has three children who live thousands of miles away. After being introduced to Elm Street by her daughter, she recalled, “I didn’t want my family to be worried about me living alone. I decided that if I couldn’t be in my own house anymore, this is where I wanted to be.”

Elm Street Assisted Living will celebrate its tenth anniversary this summer with an open house.

At the present time, there are openings for new residents. Wallace can be contacted at 725-1134 or at jill@elmstassistedliving.com. More information can be found on the web at www.elmstassistedliving.com.

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