



VALLEY NEWS — LIBBY MARCH

Marie Esselborn, of Hanover, during an interview at her home in 2013. Esselborn recently received Wheelock Terrace Assisted Living's Senior Service Award, which honors a senior whose volunteer efforts benefit other local seniors.

'What It Means to Serve Others'

Hanover Volunteer Receives Wheelock Terrace Senior Service Award

By AIMEE CARUSO

Valley News Staff Writer

HANOVER — From the challenges of caring for a loved one with dementia, to her experience as a senior health care patient, to the benefits of long-distance walking, 81-year-old Marie Esselborn freely shares what she knows. The Hanover resident volunteers with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Aging Resource Center and serves as a patient representative at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. Recently, she received Wheelock Terrace Assisted Living's Senior Service Award, which honors a senior whose volunteer efforts benefit other local seniors.

"Marie's dedication to giving back to those around her is a wonderful example of what it means to serve others," Melissa Suckling, executive director of Wheelock Terrace, said in a news release from the assisted living community. "We're proud to support Marie through all of her efforts at the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Aging Resource Center and the work they all do to support our local seniors."

The Aging Resource Center and Esselborn each received \$500 from Wheelock Terrace as part of the award, during a ceremony last month at the assisted living community.

Esselborn, who cared for her husband, Albert Esselborn, when he developed dementia, said volunteering is a way to "gift forward" what they received from the greater community.

Alzheimer's journey," Esselborn, a retired teacher, said in a phone interview. "I can't help everybody, and I can't pay everyone back, so I pay it forward."

She first visited the Lebanon-based Aging Resource Center in 2010, seeking help with the pressures of being a caregiver. That was right around the time she gave up driving.

"I noticed I was under a lot of stress and I was making mistakes, and I just couldn't bear to be the person who caused the injury or death of someone," said Esselborn, who took up long distance walking at age 58. "I get along just fine with Advance Transit and my feet and my friends."

Since then, she's become an active volunteer at the Aging Resource Center, where she is among a group of mentors who work with fourth-year students from Geisel School of Medicine. They have "a real conversation" about issues related to treating older people, and what "we elderly look for in doctors," Esselborn said. "It's a wonderful interchange."

She also leads Get Hooked on Walking, an exercise class offered through the center, in which participants walk in pairs or small groups through the corridors or DHMC.

"People seem to be enjoying it," said Esselborn, who's walked 10 marathons. "One day we're going to run out of space."

Lori Fortini, program leader with the Aging Resource Center, called Esselborn "a very caring person."

"Anything that we would ever ask her to do, she says

Volunteer Receives Award

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1

yes," Fortini said. And her willingness to share her experience makes a difference to other seniors.

As facilitator of a support group for caregivers for people with dementia issues, she can offer real empathy and help participants "with all of these emotional things," she said. "And they can see that it's going to be OK."

Before his death on Dec. 28, 2015, Albert Esselborn had lived at Wheelock Terrace for more than four years. Yet Marie Esselborn had

never heard of the senior service award until she received it.

"It touched my heartstrings when I was called by the Aging Resource Center and was told about it," said Esselborn, for whom volunteering is a crucial part of staying healthy.

"It keeps me involved across the board, emotionally, physically and socially," she said. "And that's what one needs to do to age well."



Aimee Caruso can be reached at acaruso@vnews.com or 603-727-3210.