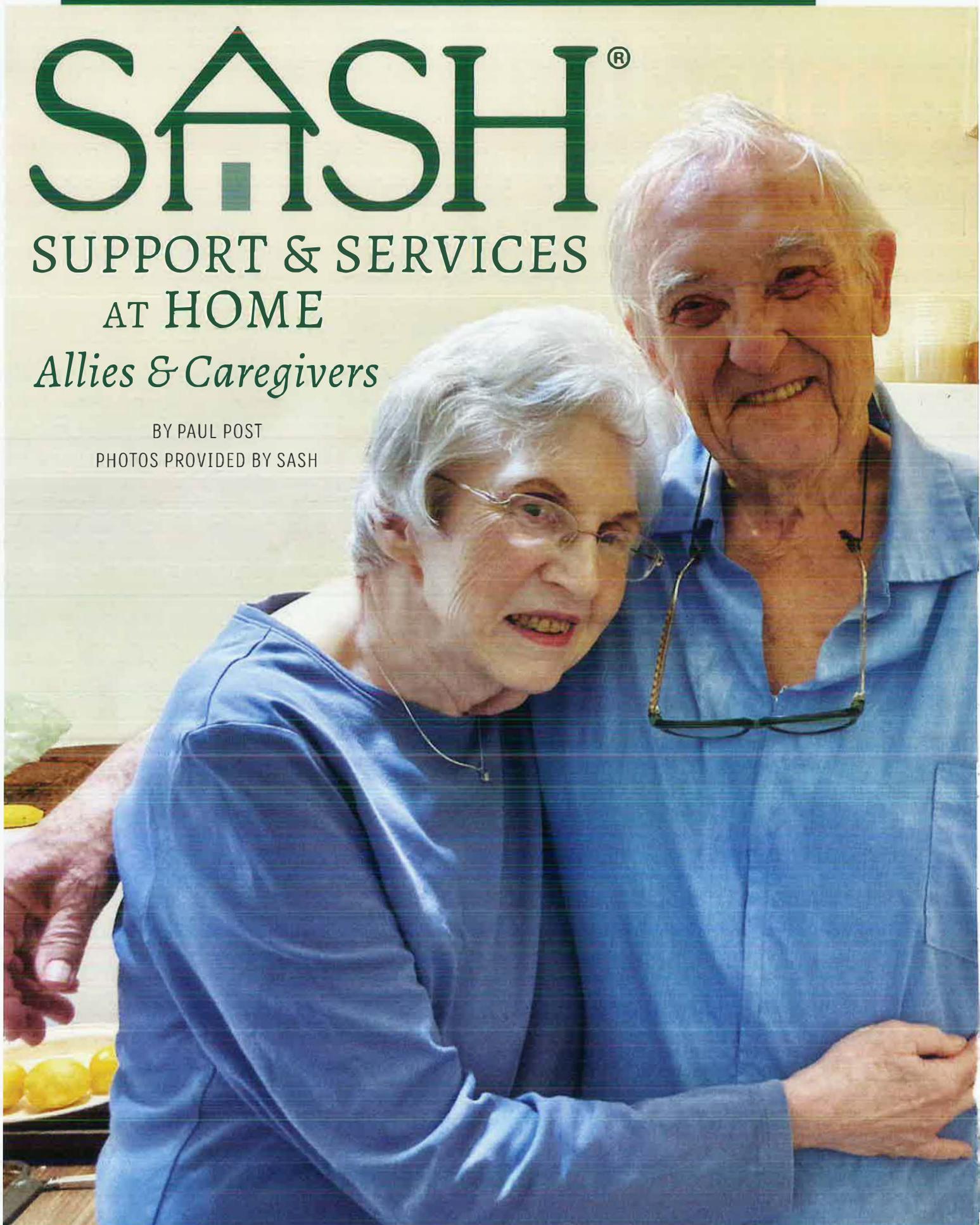


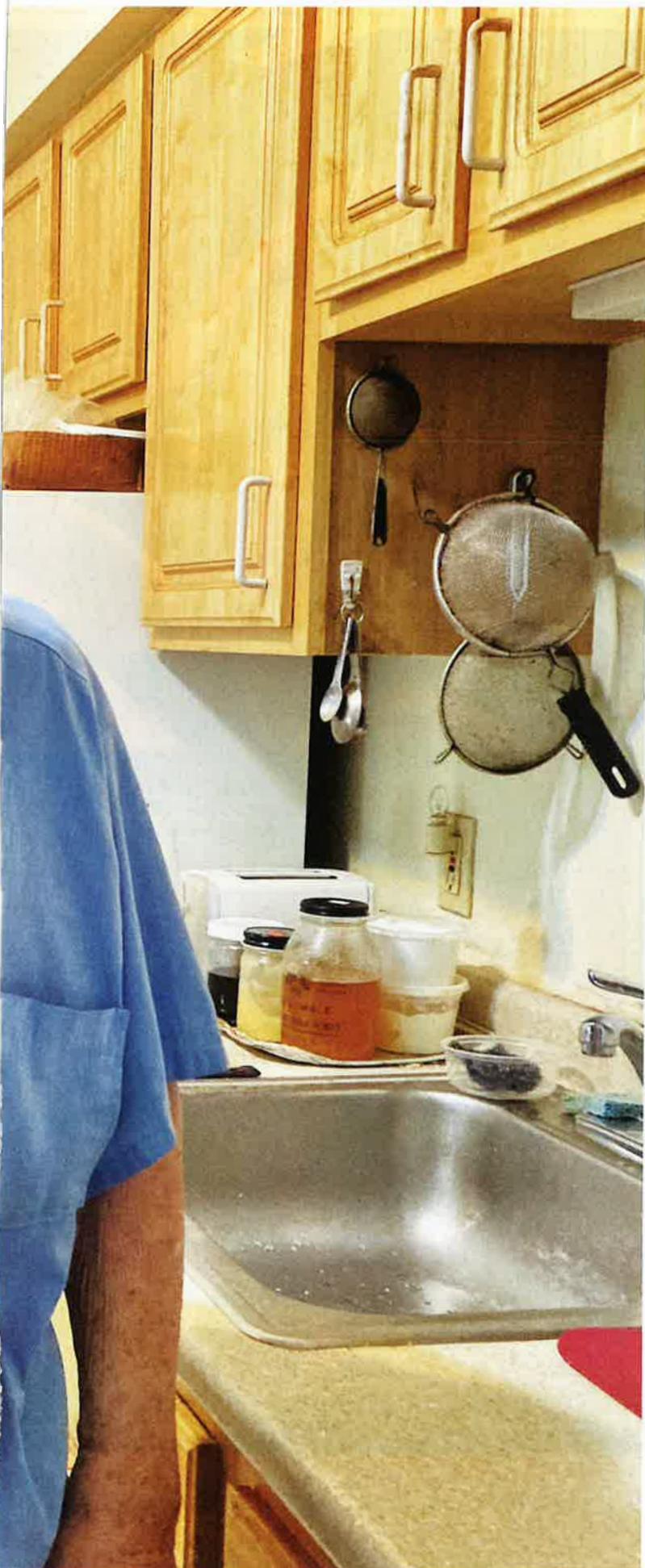
# SASH<sup>®</sup>

SUPPORT & SERVICES  
AT HOME

*Allies & Caregivers*

BY PAUL POST  
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY SASH





*"They've been a lifesaver to me. I don't know where I'd be without them. They're great, they really are."*

—Verna White, Rutland

*"My sister, a Rutland resident, was diagnosed with dementia. I started out knowing nothing, at the bottom of the learning curve. They explained and advised what I could be doing as a family member to be more effective and helpful, and be prepared for what's coming."*

—Charles Brinley, Connecticut

*"My older brother, who is kind of mentally challenged, lost his wife last year. I don't know what I would have done without this program. They've done such a great job to lift his spirits and get him back into his routine. He's doing remarkable. I can't say enough about them."*

—Greg Taylor, Rutland

THESE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE MANY LIVES THAT HAVE BENEFITED FROM SUPPORT & SERVICES AT HOME (SASH), A STATEWIDE POPULATION HEALTH MODEL THAT HELPS MEDICARE RECIPIENTS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES LIVE INDEPENDENTLY AT HOME BY SUPPORTING THEIR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING. Founded in 2011, SASH was developed by Burlington-based Cathedral Square Corporation and is administered locally by Rutland Housing Authority (RHA), although many clients live in residences throughout the community as well.

"Providing high quality, compassionate supportive services is not what we do. It's who we are," said Kevin Loso, RHA chief executive officer.

Anna Lang is one of several SASH care coordinators that provide individualized, on-site support along with a wellness nurse. Lang alone works with about 70 area residents. If SASH can't fulfill a need directly, she finds a healthcare provider or program that can.

"I think of us as a referral agency," she said. "It's SASH, but it's also our partnering agencies throughout Rutland County. It really takes a team of people to make things happen and keep people at home. We do an assessment to get to know participants and identify an area they might be struggling in."

Needs run the gamut. For example, physical therapy could be lined up for someone injured in a domestic fall. Or, grief counseling might be recommended for someone who recently lost a close loved one.

"It's a participant-driven program," Lang said. "They're in the driver's seat as to how much help they want. We check on people at least once a month, depending on their needs. If I see a need I'll ask if they're willing to try something."

SASH is an entirely free program. Participants are sometimes referred to SASH by doctors or learn about it, word-of-mouth, from family and friends. People may enroll online at: [www.sashvt.org](http://www.sashvt.org), email ([sash@cathedralsquare.org](mailto:sash@cathedralsquare.org)) or call Rutland SASH Supervisor Carol Keefe (802-558-4569) who assigns a care coordinator to them. There might be a short waiting list depending on a person's need, but for the most part services begin almost immediately.

Verna White, 67, moved to Rutland four years ago from Augusta, Georgia, and underwent triple bypass surgery last winter after learning she was at risk of having a major heart attack. "My medical doctor is in Middlebury," she said. "I used to go to the SASH office to video-conference with my doctor. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to see and talk to him. So they've really helped me so much. If I need advice I'll call and ask, 'What do I do about this situation? Where do I go to get help?'"

No task is too small or insignificant.

SASH workers took care of White's pet birds while she was hospitalized and when it was time to come home, they got shoes for her to wear as her boots had somehow gotten lost during the transfer from Rutland Regional Medical Center to UVM Medical Center in Burlington.

Charles Brinley said SASH has



Stephanie Bertrand, SASH coordinator, leads a group in chair exercises.



Anna Lang, SASH Coordinator, visits a program participant Archie Corey.



Wellness Nurse, Katy Fredette, makes a home visit to Archie Corey.

been an invaluable asset in helping him navigate his sister's dementia-related healthcare needs. "It's a moving target because the disease moves," he said. "It doesn't stay static forever. It's a continual learning process and I'm still in it."

Anna Lang has lent a hand, every step of the way, he said.

"Anna has been my single greatest source of help and support the past couple years," Brinley said. "She and

I talk about what's next, what lies ahead. She's connected us to programs that provide rent and energy support that have been a huge help because my sister has so little income. I could pay off her past bills, primarily medical, because she didn't have to pay rent for a few months. So we've turned my sister's financial situation from dire to really workable."

Brinley said Lang also coordinates with others in his sister's sphere of

medical providers. "They share information so they're up to date about needs and how to help," he said.

Greg Taylor learned about SASH from former Wellness Nurse Linda Bemis, who worked with Lang before retiring last year. "Anna came over within a couple of days and I tell you what, it's not only made my brother's life easier, but mine as well," Taylor said. "She gave us information on programs like Meals on Wheels, which



comes every day, and getting rides to doctor's appointments. She's setting all this stuff up. I wouldn't have had a clue, where to go, where to start."

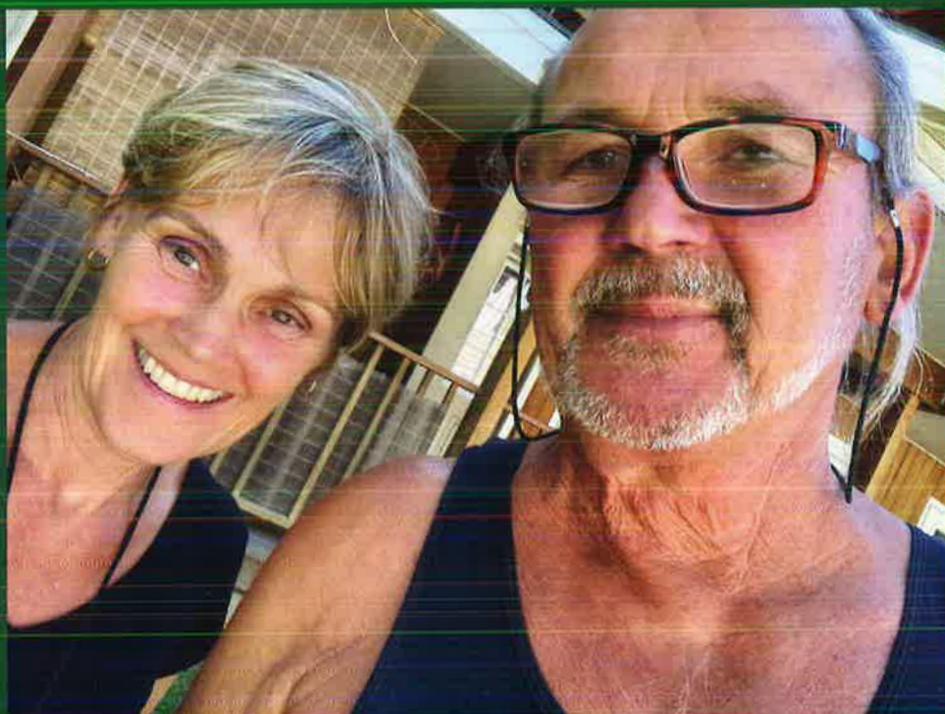
Taylor was in Florida and couldn't get home right away for medical reasons when his brother really needed help. "They (SASH) grabbed the bull by the horns and either Linda or Anna would go over at least once a week to check on him, give him a ride if he needed groceries or helping with smaller projects in his apartment," he said. "They did all this before I even came back. Anna even set up a schedule for bus routes so he can go to Hannaford, Walmart or the bank. I never would have thought of most of these things."

Statewide, SASH services about 5,000 Vermont residents and the program has expanded to Minnesota and Rhode Island as well. "Other states are looking at our model," said Carol Keefe, the Rutland program's manager.

Anyone seeking to become a SASH coordinator, working with clients, must be compassionate, flexible, have strong communication skills, pay close attention to detail, and understand how to advocate on behalf of people's needs, Keefe said.

Stephanie Bertrand spent 25 years with Rutland Mental Health Services and before that was a social work assistant with the Visiting Nurses Association before joining SASH four years ago. "I like supporting people with problem solving and just engaging with them," she said.

Her job was extremely challenging the past two years as home health aides, provided by other agencies, couldn't help people during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Even more than the housekeeping work they do, the socialization they provide is extremely important for a person's well-being," Bertrand said. "That's been a major issue. There's been a lot



TOP Carol Keefe, SASH Implementation Manager  
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of social isolation that's contributed to accelerated cognitive decline."

But by taking extra precautions, Bertrand secured extra care for people in high-need or emergency-type situations, allowing them to stay in their homes a few more years. She also gave her business cell phone number to each of the 85 people she works with, so they could reach out when needed, and used virtual programming such as Zoom to stay in contact.

Whether it's face-to-face or through modern technology, she's found the job extremely rewarding. "For me it's the personal satisfaction of one-on-one relationships and having that impact on someone's life, as well as being able to coordinate other services for people," she said.

For more information about SASH, visit [sashvt.org](http://sashvt.org)

*Paul Post is a former reporter for The Saratogian newspaper in Saratoga Spring, NY where his work was recognized in many state and nationwide contests. He also does extensive freelance writing for a variety of sports, businesses, regional and agricultural publications, and he has written three books.*