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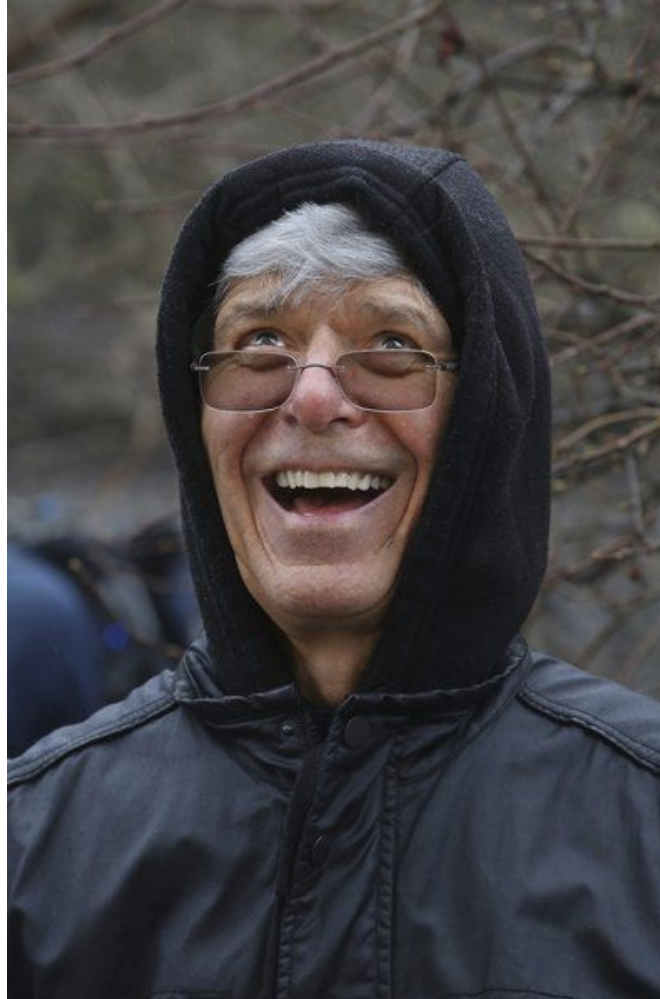
FEATURED

## Cut off by COVID-19

Senior homes bridge gap between families, loved ones

By Sean Murphy Staff Writer

Apr 2, 2020



Mike Springer/Staff photoWet weather couldn't dampen the mood of Leo Dubois, as he and his family sang happy birthday to brother-in-law Arthur Thibault outside Bear Mountain at Andover. Coronavirus restrictions prohibited family from going inside to visit Thibault, who turned 75 on Monday.

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The number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise with no end in sight.

The pandemic has shut the doors of Andover schools, restaurants and other businesses. But perhaps nowhere has the pain of disruptions caused by the crisis been felt more acutely than hospitals and other medical facilities, specifically those that cater to the memory-impaired.

Lack of communication over a period of time can be stressful to anyone, but the absence of contact between families and their loved ones suffering from Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia can be devastating, health officials say.

Here are ways local homes for the elderly are easing that emotional pain:

### **A small act of kindness**

"This is a challenging time for our residents who are somewhat isolated, not able to see their families like they're used to," said Karla Rossi, executive director at Stone Hill at Andover, an assisted living and memory care facility. "We're trying to give them some degree of normalcy here at the community."

Normalcy arrived at Stone Hill, and five other area senior living facilities recently, in the form of 500 hand-delivered potted flowers with individual notes of encouragement. The plants came courtesy of Northeast Nursery of Peabody, and Erin DiCarlo and Lauren Watts of Dovetail Companies, a business devoted to helping older adults transition to senior living communities.

"We're hearing from our peer elder care providers, as well as family members, that people are feeling saddened and overwhelmed," said DiCarlo, a certified dementia practitioner. "We wanted to do a small act of kindness to help brighten people's day, so I thought maybe a flower could let someone know that we're thinking of them."

For one of the residents at Stone Hill, that seemingly small gesture made an immediate impact.

"They're really wonderful people to bring us flowers," said Bo Kennedy, who moved to Stone Hill with his wife in July. "Barbara and I have each other, but there are a lot of single residents here, so a gift like that goes a long way."

### **Singing in the rain**

Arthur Thibault of Methuen fell recently and fractured some ribs. In early March, he was transferred from a hospital to Bear Mountain at Andover, a skilled-nursing facility that provides short-term rehabilitation and long-term care.

"Before the fall, everyday, without fail, his sisters take him everywhere. They take good care of him," said Thibault's brother-in-law Al Naffah.

"Then he goes into the facility and he doesn't see anybody," Naffah said, referring to restrictions prohibiting visitors due to the virus. "He feels abandoned. We haven't seen him in three weeks."

On March 30, Thibault turned 75, and his family wasn't going to let him spend his special day alone. Despite not being allowed to enter the building, Thibault's three siblings and their spouses gathered outside the facility in a light drizzle to sing happy birthday.

"I think it's a fabulous idea," said Connie Paullis, executive director of Bear Mountain at Andover. "This is a family who's unable to see their family member right now at the facility, so they came up with a way to continue to celebrate his birthday and make him feel special."

## **Technology to the rescue**

Assisted living and memory care facilities like Bridges by EPOCH at Andover are keeping families connected with their loved ones through technology.

"It's not good keeping memory-impaired residents socially isolated, so we're doing our best to stimulate them and keep them engaged and entertained," said Traci Simpson, wellness director at Bridges.

A company called IN2L has created a platform using what they call person-centered engagement technology. It caters to the specific needs of senior-living communities. Each community is outfitted with two large screens and a laptop for each resident, to bridge the gap between residents and the outside world.

"With IN2L we're actually able to tailor the tablet to every resident's profile," said Traci Simpson, wellness director at the Bridges Andover location. "We talk to the families and then we upload the resident's favorite music, games, hobbies and even family pictures — all the things that they love."

The company also uses a technology platform called TeleHealth Services, allowing patients to see doctors virtually, on a laptop, in the comfort of their own apartment.

"We're still fully operational within all our communities," said Adele Pepin, vice president of marketing of EPOCH Senior Living, parent company of all 10 Bridges by EPOCH and two Waterstone facilities. "We're utilizing technology in all the ways we can to keep the day to day flowing."

## Conversation

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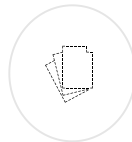


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