



Home, sweet home — thanks to home care

Supporting elders
and their families by
tending to details

By **CHELI MENNELLA**
For The Recorder

Frances Mary Avery has lived in her Charlemont home since the 1940s. And she's not planning on moving anytime soon. This is the home where she settled with her husband, Henry Avery, the fourth of five generations of Averys to run the historic Avery's General Store. This is the home where she raised four children, and where she painted dozens of works of art, inspired by the landscape and weather outside her window.

"No, I'm not moving. Not unless I need real serious help," Avery said. "I wouldn't fight against that. But when Henry died he had already talked with me about it. He said, 'There's no reason on earth why you have to move.'" And with measures her family has in place to ensure her well-being, she hasn't had to.

Avery is fortunate to have her family nearby, friendly neighbors next door, and a solid, dependable house. She is in extraordinary health, spry and able-bodied, and determined to live out her golden years surrounded by beloved family photos, her oil paintings decorating the walls, and the familiar comforts of the home she's known for most of her life. She is especially attached to her art studio, which is a source of pride and a testament to her years of creative endeavors. Marvelously detailed dollhouses, finished paintings, an easel holding a canvas with the delicate outline of the tree standing in the backyard, and fashion designs from her studies at a New York City fashion academy are just



PHOTO/CHELI MENNELLA

Frances Mary Avery of Charlemont sits in her art studio. This is the home where she raised four children and painted dozens of works of art inspired by the landscape and weather outside her window. With the help of her family and expert home care, she is able to remain in her own home, surrounded by the people and things she loves.

some of the works of art that fill the space.

Karen Hogness, Avery's daughter-in-law, said the family is honoring Avery's wishes to stay at home by supporting her independence and ensuring her living environment is completely safe. An automatic chairlift takes her up and down the stairs, and the shower has been retrofitted so she can walk right into it. These modifications help make it possible for Avery to

live independently. The other important piece of her safety protocol is having someone come to her house every day, seven days a week. Reliable in-home care has made all the difference in helping Avery stay at home and stay out of assisted living.

Making it all possible

When Avery's family noticed she needed extra help in the mornings, SEE HOME CARE A2

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Home care

FROM A1

they arranged to have a home health aid from Comprehensive Home Care, of Deerfield, assist her as she begins the day.

"She makes sure I'm dressed and have breakfast," Avery said of the help she receives. "One day we might do a little laundry, or a little cleaning. But with just me alone in the house there is very little to be done, so we often sit down and knit together. And sometimes she drives my car and we go out to lunch, which makes it very nice." Her caregiver also takes her to the market and to the post office. "It means I can get out to shop for yarn," Avery added, which is an essential supply for her daily knitting projects.

"The nice thing about home care is that it has allowed her to maintain the schedule that she's always had. Getting the mail, going down to the store — all that has remained the same," Hogness said. "It's comforting to us as the family to have somebody here with her. So she can come downstairs and have help with breakfast and someone's in the house when she showers, someone's in the house to help with light housework. Having somebody here is one of the things that helps her stay safe."

"Part of why we decided to go with Comprehensive," Hogness went on to



PHOTO BY CHELI MENNELLA
Karen Hogness poses with her mother-in-law, Frances Mary Avery.

explain, "is that we can expand the amount of help, if needed. If we want extra hours or another chunk of time covered — that's very flexible. It's real peace of mind to know we can do that. And what I really appreciate is that she's covered seven days a week, no matter what. They always have somebody here. And that's been wonderful." That reliability and that stability of care are critical components for Avery's stay-at-home success.

Comprehensive Home Care

"We have someone getting care every hour of every day," said Kelly Hudson who owns Comprehensive Home Care with her husband, Curt Hudson. And nothing deters that, not even the harsh New England weather. "You can count on us," Curt Hudson said. "Last winter, in our community, a policeman took one of our caregivers through a

“Having somebody here is one of the things that helps her stay safe.”

KAREN HOGNESS
daughter-in-law of Frances Avery



PHOTO BY CHELI MENNELLA
Avery with original designs from her time at a fashion academy in NYC.

roadblock to a dying patient's house." That's how committed and serious the company and its caregivers are about providing quality home care.

Comprehensive is a private-pay home care agency that provides geriatric home care services in Franklin and Hampshire counties. Based in Deerfield, the company was started in 1990 with just one client. Curt and Kelly Hudson of Conway bought Comprehensive in January of 2001. "We have a little over 100 employees now. We are here 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year," Kelly Hudson said. The kinds of home care services they provide range from meal planning and light housekeeping to basic companionship and bed-bound care for dying patients.

"A lot of people ask us, 'How do you do that? Do you have experience, do you have medical experience?'" Kelly

Hudson said. Her answer: "We have about 100 employees, we have a lot of clients. We manage people and their problems. We've gotten the requisite things we would need if we were to do the work (they are both licensed CNAs), but with the number of clients we have, we couldn't do all the work anyway. So we end up managing the people, and working with the daughter-in-laws and putting together care for loved ones."

"When someone comes to us privately, they ask for exactly what they want. If they want to start at 6 a.m. and they want 4 hours, we give them 6 to 10 a.m.," Kelly said. "If they want their floor washed, we'll wash their floors," Curt added.

"We're not bound by anything other than what the client is asking for and,

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PHOTO BY CHELI MENNELLA

A chairlift helps Frances Mary Avery of Charlemont access both floors of her home. Her paintings hang on the wall behind her.

Home care

FROM A2

of course, the laws of the state,” Kelly Hudson continued. “We can make the service about the client. We can keep the client at the front, and we can take care of the client according to the client’s needs and wishes. As long as it makes sense and it’s in reason, we can do what the client wants, all while keeping safety in the forefront.”

Safety

Safety is a primary concern when deciding whether an elder should stay in their home. The first line of safety at Comprehensive Home Care is through Erica Morrison-Brazitis

of Belchertown, who is the company’s director of client operations.

“I’m the first face that families meet and I help them sort out the best possible solution for their loved ones,” she said. “I am a resource for families making tough decisions. I introduce some of Comprehensive Home Care’s services, and work with them to see if home care is a good fit. Then I do a home assessment to ensure the home is safe for the potential client and the caregivers. If a family decides that yes, home care service is the best solution, then I do an intake, which is a series of questions concerning medical history, physical conditions, likes and dislikes, as well as hobbies and interests.”

She then works with schedulers to select proper caregivers and stays apprised of how clients are faring. If a nurse suggests home services might need to be increased or decreased and

the number of hours adjusted, then Morrison-Brazitis assists clients in managing those changes. “We at Comprehensive Home Care take a lot of time and effort to ensure home care is the best decision. If we feel the situation is unsafe (like an elder is left alone for too many hours), we will suggest more home care, or suggest a different situation. And for some, that might be a hospice situation.” Morrison-Brazitis, who is also a hospice volunteer at Cooley Dickinson Hospital, is astute about the care and comfort available to an individual during terminal illness and end-of-life circumstances.

“The most important thing about my job,” she explained, “is to help families get through making a tough decision of whether to

“We ... take a lot of time and effort to ensure home care is the best decision.”

ERICA MORRISON-BRAZITIS
Comprehensive Home Care

help their loved one stay in their home or move them to an assisted living situation. There is so much information, and families are often overwhelmed with the amount of it. Most of the time, families are not prepared. That’s what drives my passion — helping families through a tough time and making sure their loved ones are safe.”

Morrison-Brazitis noted that a key piece to the company’s success is the compassion and patience of their caregivers, remarking how it takes a unique individual to work with elders, many of whom are in the beginning stages of Alzheimer’s and dementia.

Companionship and compassionate care

“The company’s focus on being a responsible employer and responsible

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Home care: Respite care gives families a much-needed break

FROM A3

member of the community attracts a certain type of person to do the caregiver work," Curt Hudson said. "And that makes the care significantly easier to deliver. So there's a circle here."

"Over the past 16 years we have built a large group of caregivers who have worked here three, four, six, eight years," Kelly Hudson added. "Some have even been here since before we started, and they are committed. We won 'Franklin Favorites,' and we always say we attribute it to the care and the compassion and the reliability of the people who work here. Because they are the ones who take each detail, each issue, and work it out for each client. We have some really good people that work here and they are amazing with the clients."

"They have relationships with our clients that are impossible to replicate; it's a really incredible thing to see," Curt Hudson said. "In many cases, we become like a member of the family."

Matching the chemistry of what's needed in the house to the pool of caregivers is an art unto itself. Kelly Hudson explained, "One thing I think we do extremely well and part of the reason why we are reliable and stable is because we come at our scheduling from the point of 'Let's figure out the right chemistry, let's get the right fit.

And if it's not the right fit, then let's change it. Let's always keep the client first.'" Someone answers their phone 24 hours a day. So whether it's 2 a.m. Or 2 p.m., their schedulers can match the best caregiver to the client for any situation.

Frances Mary Avery describes her caregiver as "wonderful. Incidentally, I also knew her before — she worked for us at the store — so I knew her as a kind of friend. That makes it nice. We have a great time," she said.

Hogness noted that a lot of Avery's home care is simple companionship. "They laugh together; they do the crossword puzzles together; they knit together. And that's what's important to the family — it's that wonderful companionship as well as all the hard work the caregivers do."

Help for caregivers, too

Aina Barten of Conway also arranged for Comprehensive Home Care to provide support for her brother, Mark Niemela. Niemela, who is 62 years old and has mild dementia, lives with Barten and her husband. "My brother can't take care of himself but he's living with us and has done so for about five years now," Barten explained. "It's going fairly well but we do get worn down, as most caregivers do, and desperately need some time to ourselves. We don't have family living

nearby who can pitch in, so it was wonderful to find out that Comprehensive did have an arrangement where Mark can go off with one of their caregivers for a period of some hours. And we've been doing that every other week on a Saturday afternoon."

Mark and his caregiver go to the movies or wander around Amherst, where Mark used to live, or have something to eat together. "Mark is happy with it and we're delighted," she said. "Mark's aide is an experienced caregiver and a very fine person. I would be happy to have him in any role in my life because he's a person of discernment; he's very agreeable and seems to have a good understanding of Mark. It's a great thing for my brother because he gets very tired of us — it's like having parents all the time living with you — and he's glad to go off with his care-

giver. It's worked out extremely well so far."

Barten mentioned how important it has been for her family to find reliable, professional help. The respite care they receive gives Barten a much-needed break from daily caretaking, while giving her brother companionship and an enriching adventure.

The Hudsons recognize the emotional value of helping elders stay in their homes. "We're actually doing something that really matters to someone else," Kelly Hudson said. "And in many cases that client could not be home if someone wasn't watching out for the details to keep them home."

For more information about Comprehensive Home Care and their services, visit their website at www.comprehensive-homecare.com, or call 413-665-9058.

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