

Mt. Greylock and Williamstown Commons Help a Husband and Wife Reclaim Their Lives

Much to Celebrate

Louis and Susan Chalifoux celebrate his recovery and her "graduation" from rehab.



How It All Began

When they began their vacation in Paris, Susan and Louis Chalifoux had no idea how profoundly their lives would soon change—and not in a way they ever could have imagined.

It was November 25, 2009, and Susan and Louis were eager to get home. The next day they were expecting a large group for Thanksgiving dinner, and there was much to do. Unfortunately, their flight was delayed three hours in France. Then, they flew eight-and-a-half hours from

Paris to New York City. Finally, they began the drive home to North Adams just after midnight. After several hours on the road, only half a mile from their house, a weary Louis fell asleep at the wheel and their car slammed into a tree.

Trauma Care at Berkshire Medical Center

Their vehicle totaled, both Susan and Louis had serious injuries that they likely wouldn't have survived if a passer-by hadn't found them at

3:30 AM and dialed 911. Both were extricated from their car by emergency responders and taken to North Adams Regional Hospital. A short time later, they were rushed to the trauma center at Berkshire Medical Center. Both suffered numerous critical injuries so severe—including internal bleeding, broken bones, and injury to various vital organs—that their parish priest was called in twice to give them last rites.

After their respective surgeries, both lay in the critical care unit on ventilators and in medically induced comas. Although Louis sustained the more severe injuries, Susan developed more serious complications. Remarkably, Louis, 66, began to recover soon after surgery, and a few weeks later, he was discharged to Mt. Greylock Extended Care Facility for continued care.

Meanwhile, Susan, 65, remained in a coma for 10 weeks, from mid-November through the end of January, when she finally began to improve. But after 10 weeks in a coma, she awoke extremely weak, with atrophied muscles, unable to move much. A lengthy stint in rehab was clearly in her future.

The Right Facilities to Meet Their Needs

When Louis needed post-hospital rehab and nursing care, Mt. Greylock was the obvious choice. Being just a half mile down the road from Berkshire Medical Center, where Susan remained an inpatient, gave Louis great comfort.

By the time Susan was ready for rehab, Louis was home, and they wanted to be near each other—so a North County facility was ideal for her. As a former director of nursing in a local, long-term care facility, Susan knew exactly where she wanted to receive care: She chose Williamstown Commons. "I wanted Williamstown Commons because there is not a facility [in the area] that can provide their quality of rehabilitation services," she said. "They have a wonderful reputation, and that reputation is well-deserved."

Kindness Beyond Expectation

Tammy Martin, LPN, takes a moment to say good-bye to Susan.



Rehab and Recovery: Hers

When Susan arrived at Williamstown Commons on January 28, 2010, she had just spent 10 weeks in a coma, and she was unable to move her legs or lift her arms. She needed four staff members to transfer her in and out of bed. To build her up for rehab, the nursing staff began by simply moving her arms and legs for her. As Susan regained some strength and function, her seven-day-a-week rehab program began in earnest.

a *Berkshire Eagle* reporter. "I had to learn how to feed myself and bathe myself. I relearned life skills, such as cleaning and laundry.... I've learned how to walk with a cane."

A Miraculous Future

On January 15, 2010, Louis was discharged from Mt. Greylock. Completely independent, he had normal strength in his legs and normal or better stamina for climbing stairs and walking distances.

Susan was discharged on April 30, more than five months after the accident. And although she still had a way to go in her recovery, returning home, she said, was a major accomplishment. She credits the staff at Williamstown Commons for her

Rehab and Recovery: His

When he arrived at Mt. Greylock on December 22, 2009, Louis was quite deconditioned from his hospital stay. He could walk only about 100 feet with assistance. Immediately, a rehab plan was tailored to meet Louis's needs and goals as a younger patient.

Louis received therapy five to six days a week, including a progressive, resistive exercise program; squats; leg presses; lunges; and endurance training using an arm bike and a leg bike. He also worked out with Mt. Greylock's Wii system.

According to Kyle Wong, MS, PT, Mt. Greylock's director of rehabilitation, the facility's patient-centered approach to care suited Louis very well. "We created an aggressive rehab plan for him because he really wanted to get back to his wife as soon as he could," Wong explained. "And we honored *his* schedule. While his wife was in the hospital, he would visit her for a couple of hours a day. We treated him either before or after his visits with her. And on days when his family couldn't take him to visit her, we arranged transportation for him."

The same positive attitude that made Louis successful in business helped him get through his rehab—that and the fact that he knew his wife would need his support and encouragement throughout her own recovery.



A Festive and Fond Farewell

Family, friends, and staff gathered to wish Susan well as she miraculously headed home.

Susan's physical therapy sessions included strength training for her legs, balance training with and without assistive devices, improving coordination, postural awareness, and more. As she progressed, Susan learned to transfer independently in and out of motor vehicles; walk on uneven surfaces; and negotiate curbs, ramps, and stairs.

Her occupational therapy work focused on upper-body strength, eye-hand coordination, and activities of daily living, so she could take care of her own needs and be independent at home. "I had to relearn how to do things," Susan told

dramatic recovery. "The facility, the quality of care, the empathy, humor, and kindness—it was way beyond anything you would experience anywhere."

One of the unfortunate results of the accident is that Susan can't remember her trip to Paris. As she left Williamstown Commons, she looked on the bright side, telling the *Eagle* reporter, "I joke with Lou that he'll just have to take me there again."

Thanks to Mt. Greylock and Williamstown Commons, he'll have that chance! They both will.▲