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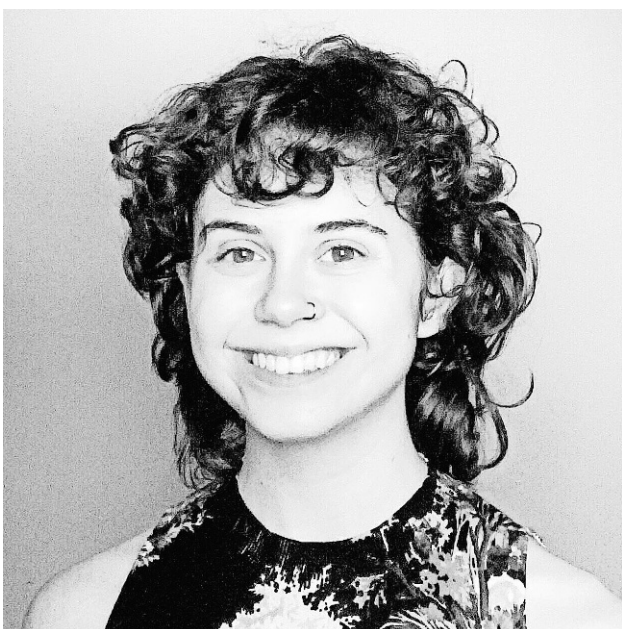
THE GOOD LIFE

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The Fontanellas' Home is Made Safe and Accessible Through LifePath and the Helping Homebound Heroes Program



By Noelle McManus, Client Services Senior Program Assistant

Charles Fontanella was born in 1931—“only a few years ago,” he jokes. As a twenty-year-old soldier in the US Army, he saw a photograph of one of his fellow soldier’s cousins: a girl named Jean. Charles wrote her a letter, and the two kept up a correspondence until their marriage in January of 1955.

Today, they live in Turners Falls, Massachusetts, and are open about the compromises one needs to make for a successful, long-lasting marriage. “You need a lot of patience,” remarks Jean, “and he’s the patient one.” As parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and even great-great-grandparents, the Fontanellas are no strangers to hard work and commitment. Charles began his professional life amidst the Great Depression at the age of fourteen, working at a local tobacco farm after school for thirty cents an hour. “I’d give my mother five dollars of the \$6.50 I’d made,” he explains. “The dollar and change would be my allowance.” As an adult, he worked in retail at A & P and K-Mart before purchasing his own general store with Jean. They traveled throughout New England in search of a suitable store before settling on

was a special environment for her husband, saying, “He’s a people person, anyway.” Even after selling the store to Royce Oil in 1981, Charles continued to work into his seventies. He was a fixture in the community, not only at his day job but also as treasurer of the Lions Club—an organization he remained part of for forty-eight years, even receiving the prestigious Melvin Jones fellowship for his dedication. Now, years later, he fondly



(Left to right) Jean and Charles with Home Safety volunteers.

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recalls his active lifestyle. “I wish I could still work,” he confesses.

Age has brought Charles and Jean new limitations; as Charles requires a walker to move around, the couple laid wooden planks over the front steps so he could leave the house. “We got him out there alright,” says Jean, though the solution wasn’t ideal. That was why, as part of the Helping Homebound Heroes program, LifePath sent volunteers to the Fontanellas’ house to make home modifications. The volunteer crew tested and validated the smoke and fire prevention equipment; installed 3 new bathroom grab bars, 4 new door levers in place of harder to use door knobs, and an auto-hold storm door opener; and repaired a broken handle on a back sliding glass door. In addition to this volunteer work scope, LifePath further used the grant program to have a ramp professionally designed and installed at the home to address Charles’s mobility needs.

“He keeps joking he’s going to put his go-kart on it and slide down,” chuckles Jean, as Charles chimes in, “I want to skateboard on it!” The ramp affords him newfound independence and the ability to stay active.

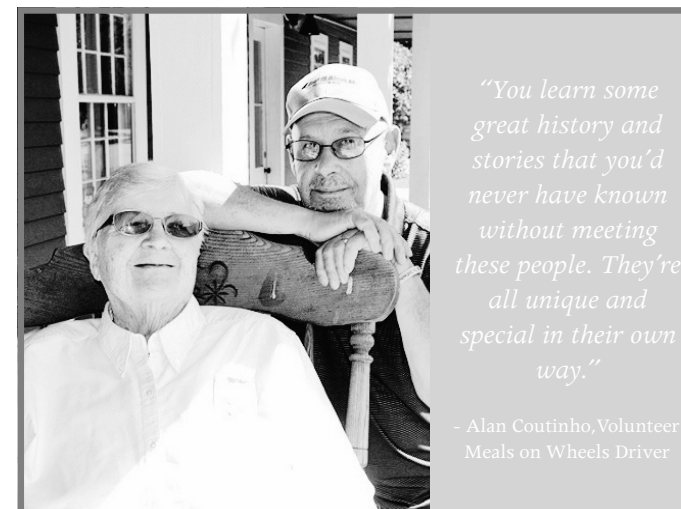
Both Fontanellas are grateful for the change, as well as how it’s allowed them to remain close to their family, including one of their young grandsons, who uses it to play with his toy trucks. When asked about their experience with the volunteers, Jean exclaims, “Oh, they were really great!” They were nice and professional, she says, and did the work “no problem at all.” Charles agrees; he appreciates their work and the involvement of LifePath Home Safety Program Director Mark Devlin. The couple grins as they recall the help, thankful for the assistance and opportunity to regain some of their independence.

Charles is chatty. He tells me many things before I leave the couple’s home: his love of Vermont maple syrup, his time spent as a cashier at the local fall festival, his admiration of his late younger brother, his passion for Westerns, and more. It’s clear that he’s still very much a “people person,” though he insists that Jean is the one who will “talk your ear off.” The couple laughs, spins stories, and shows the true power of the love and compromise they say helped their marriage last. They’re a pleasure to meet with, and an even greater pleasure to help. Through the Helping Homebound Heroes program, funded by The Home Depot Foundation and administered by Meals on Wheels America, the Fontanellas—and families like them—can live in the safe, accessible homes they need and deserve.



The Fontanellas’ stairs before the Home Safety modifications (left), and the professionally-installed ramp after (right).

If you are interested in volunteering for the Home Safety Program, call LifePath Volunteer Resources at our main number, 413-773-5555, to learn more. If you would like to find out how the Home Safety Program could help you, call 413-773-5555, X1230, to speak to a Resource Consultant.



“You learn some great history and stories that you’d never have known without meeting these people. They’re all unique and special in their own way.”

- Alan Coutinho, Volunteer Meals on Wheels Driver

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Jean and Charles Fontanella, married since 1955, in their Turners Falls home.

one close to home, in Ashfield.

“I loved that store,” Charles says. “That was the best job I ever had.” Jean agrees that it