

Access to an Active Life

A family's bequests will help Northeast Passage fulfill its mission well into the future

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A GROUP OF VETERANS IN MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE, ENJOYED CANDLEPIN BOWLING WITH NORTHEAST PASSAGE'S PATHWAYS PROGRAM.

When Debra Boucher retired in 2017, she faced some lifestyle adjustments beyond those of the average retiree. A once-avid hiker and biker, on and off the trail, the Manchester, New Hampshire, resident had given up the sports she loved after a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis.

But then a friend told her about Northeast Passage. The UNH-based adaptive sports and therapeutic recreation program has been serving individuals with disabilities since 1990.

“I was a recreational biker and hiker — I did all the 4,000-footers in New Hampshire,” Boucher says. “In fact, walking and hiking are two of the things I miss being able to do the most. But once I found out about Northeast Passage and everything that they do, I was able to become active again.”



DEBRA BOUCHER HAS PARTICIPATED IN A WIDE RANGE OF ADAPTIVE SPORTS THROUGH THE ORGANIZATION.

Boucher says she has tried just about all the adaptive sports Northeast Passage has to offer: biking, waterskiing, golf, archery, kayaking. “I can’t say enough about them,” she says.

If Philip and Shirley Gravink can’t say enough about the program, it’s not only because their daughter, Jill Gravink ’86, ’07G, is the founder. They have read the annual reports for the last 28 years.

“Every year, the number of clients has grown,” Philip Gravink says. “We want that to be the case long after we’re gone and long after Jill has retired. We want Northeast Passage to continue; it’s evident that it is fulfilling a great need.”

That thinking led the Gravinks to set up a bequest that will support Northeast Passage. Philip's sister Marilyn Fierri has matched their gift and both bequests will add to the Deleo Gravink Fund established by Philip's sister Deleo before she died.

"It doesn't matter what sport it is, they find a way help people, to get them out there," Shirley Gravink says. "It's not hard to support that."

Boucher echoes the Gravinks' admiration for the organization. "They are really professional and really patient," says Boucher. "I've seen them in action in so many situations and they are just great. And I really appreciate what they do with veterans. I love what they do for me, but I love what do for veterans even more."

Boucher says there was a "big lag time" between when she had to give up her active life and when she found her way to Northeast Passage.

"They gave me that part of my life back. That's why I love them," Boucher says. "It has made such a difference. I tell people about Northeast Passage all the time."

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