



## Supporting seniors through conversation and caring

At age 92, **Loraine Busque** still values her independence. A longtime resident of Augusta who attended the churches of Saint Michael Parish, she moved to Hallowell about 15 years ago after her husband died.

“It was hard to keep the house because it was beginning to get run down,” she says. “To call in repair people to do things, it costs too much.”

She says she enjoys her apartment because she still likes to cook for herself and likes being able to gaze out at the birds that land on her second-floor deck and at deer that stroll below.

But for Loraine, getting out and about isn't as easy as it once was. A couple years back, she made the difficult choice to give up her driver's license.

“That's the worst,” she says. “I can't go to the store just to get a bread. You call a taxi, and it costs you \$12 just to get bread.”

There's also the challenge of slippery walkways.

“We've had the worst winter!”

And of carrying groceries up the stairs.

“Sometimes, when you need milk and juice and all the heavy stuff, it's hard to bring in.”

Recognizing that Loraine could use a little assistance, she was put in contact with **Catholic Charities' SEARCH program**, which is short for “Seek Elderly

Alone, Renew Courage and Hope.”

SEARCH connects seniors with community volunteers who provide companionship and assist with a variety of daily tasks. That may include taking seniors shopping, to doctors' appointments, out to dinner or the movies, or even spending some time with them at their homes playing games.

“Some are just seeking companionship. They just want to sit and talk or go for a cup of coffee. The needs vary,” says **Lynn Kidd**, program coordinator for SEARCH – Kennebec Valley.

Lynn says she looks for shared interests and compatibility when pairing seniors and volunteers.



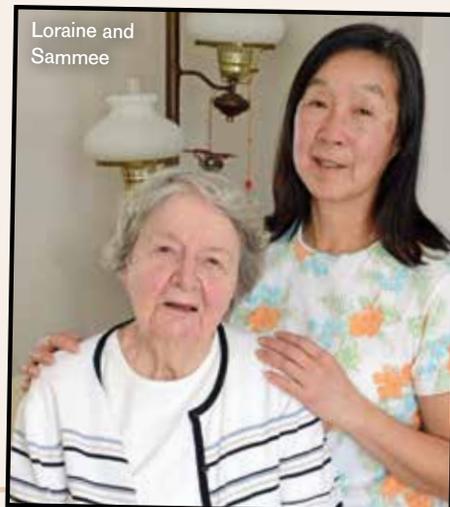
Lynn Kidd

“Some common threads throughout their life they can share,” she explains. “Also, we look at the needs of the client and what the volunteer can offer. Some volunteers can offer more hours than others.”

Loraine was paired with **Sammee Quang**, a retired nurse and active community volunteer. Sammee has

available time on Wednesdays, so that is when the two get together. Loraine tries to schedule her appointments for that day.

“Originally, I didn't really want to do the driving for people, but when I realized how isolated they are, particularly Loraine, and how helpful it is to have somebody



Loraine and Sammee



Sharing a meal together

you can depend on for a few hours, one day a week, I said, "Well, I'll do the transport and take her out," Sammee says. "I think it's hard to give up your driver's license. I hope when my time comes to give it up, there will be somebody around to help me."

Sammee has taken Loraine to doctors' appointments, to pick up prescriptions, and to hair appointments and grocery shopping. The two also regularly share lunch together at the William S. Cohen Community Center for seniors in Hallowell.

"We both like going to the Cohen Center for lunch, so that's been kind of a regular thing," says Sammee.

"You get a nice lunch for five dollars. Where can you go and eat for five dollars? You can get all the coffee or tea or whatever you want," says Loraine.

"And entertainment, too," adds Sammee.

It also gives Loraine an opportunity to mingle with other seniors.

"Sometimes, we sit at tables with other people at the Cohen Center, and sometimes, she'll bump into people she knows. So, they'll chat," says Sammee.

While Sammee is retired, Lynn stresses that those of any age can volunteer.

"Families can do it. College students can do it, even high school students if their parents can provide transportation," she says.

In addition to being program coordinator, Lynn and her children volunteer to assist a senior.

"My kids have always been involved in volunteerism, but there are families that aren't, and I think it's a great thing for families to be involved with," she says. "My kids don't have their grandparents around them, so I just look at it as a great opportunity for them to have a senior

experience with someone."

SEARCH, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary, expanded about a year ago to include Kennebec County and now serves seniors there, as well as in Androscoggin and Sagadahoc counties and in the Brunswick area. Catholic Charities is also eyeing expansion into Lincoln County with a goal of someday serving statewide. Currently, it has 140 volunteers who provided nearly 11,000 hours of support to 240 seniors in the past year.

Still, more volunteers are needed. In Kennebec County alone, there are 23 clients awaiting assistance.

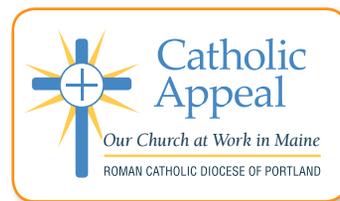
"What's challenging is that I have to tell them I don't know how long you're going to be on a waiting list," says Lynn. "I tell them, if you're out of food, give me a call, and I'll see what I can do."

Lynn says the program is in need of regular volunteers, as well as those who can be on call and those available to make phone calls to chat with seniors and check on their well-being. While she recognizes that people have busy lives, she says even two or four hours a month can be of tremendous value to a senior.

"It just makes you feel good that you can be part of someone's life," she says. "I think sometimes people don't think that one small thing can make a major difference."

When asked where she would be without Sammee's help, Loraine answers matter-of-factly, "Well, I wouldn't get anywhere."

If you are interested in learning more about the program, you can visit [www.ccmaine.org](http://www.ccmaine.org). If you are interested in volunteering in Kennebec County, contact Lynn at 207.530.0137 or [lkidd@ccmaine.org](mailto:lkidd@ccmaine.org).



## SHARING YOUR LIGHT with the elderly

*Thanks in part to your contributions to the annual Catholic Appeal, nearly 240 seniors received services through SEARCH. While volunteers are the backbone of the program, Catholic Charities staff members are needed to recruit and sign up volunteers, do background checks, provide initial orientation, pair volunteers and clients, accompany them on initial meetings, sign up seniors for the program, and provide support services along the way. Program coordinators stay in contact with both seniors and volunteers to make sure matches are working out. They will also step in if a volunteer notices any problems, for instance, a decline in a client's health.*

*In addition to SEARCH, another 1,800 seniors in all 16 Maine counties are served by Independent Support Services, another Catholic Charities' program supported in part through the annual Catholic Appeal. Workers known as "homemakers" provide services such as routine housekeeping, laundry, and transportation, allowing seniors to stay in their homes.*



Driving to appointments



SEARCH volunteer gathering