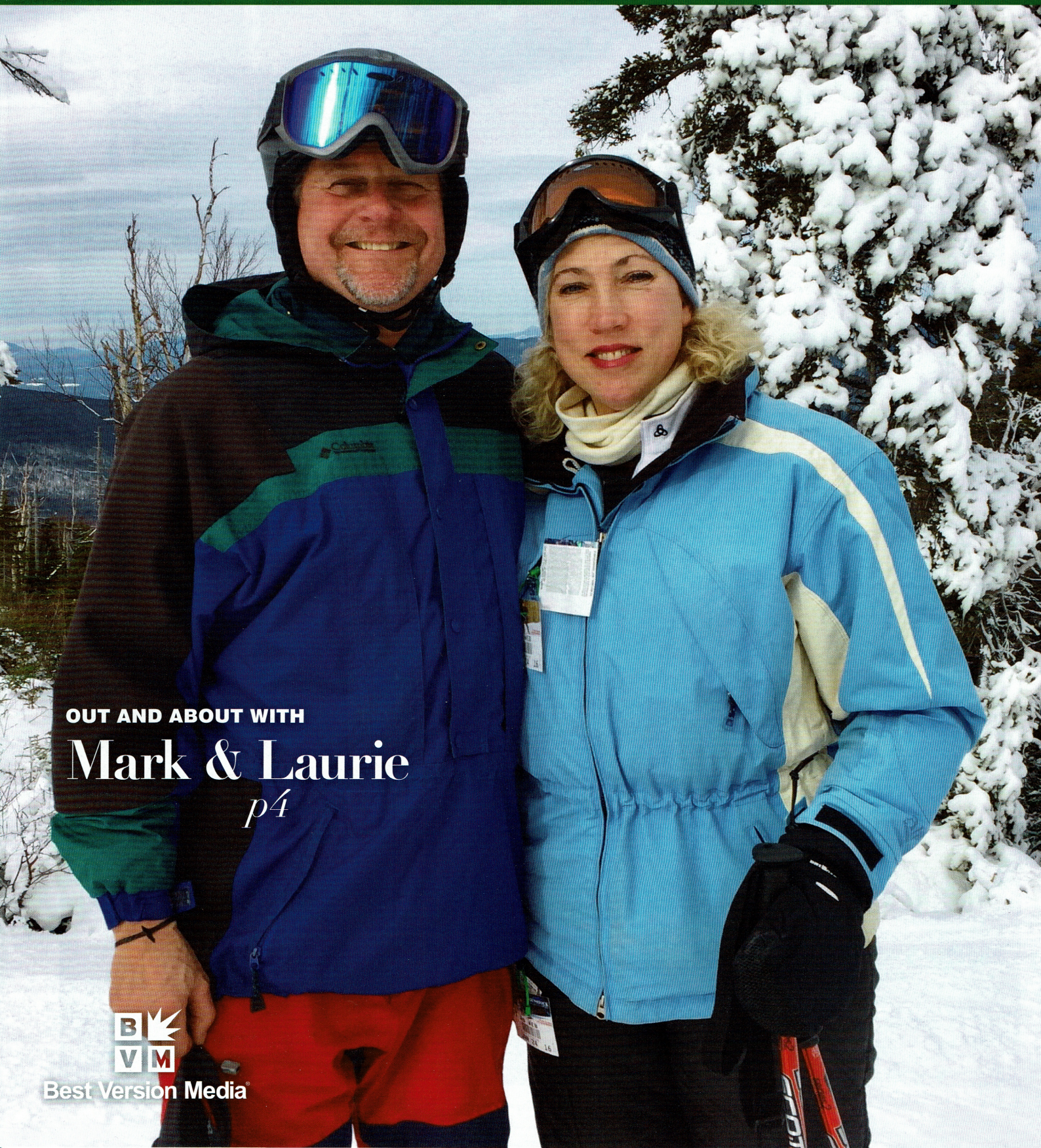


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'STEPS UP' IN PORTSMOUTH

BY ROB LEVEY

With many families in New Hampshire struggling with the opioid and drug crisis, two local residents wanted to make a difference in an area that is often overlooked.

"I was watching friends struggle in 2017 with their own child's drug addiction while being a parent to her innocent grandchild," says Denyse Richter, who lives in Portsmouth. "I felt a call to help."

After some initial research, she says she discovered something profound.

"I quickly learned that with the explosion of the opioid crisis that my friend was not alone in facing this most heart wrenching and difficult situation," she says. "To me, these people are everyday heroes. They put aside their own hopes and dreams to raise a young child or children late in their lives."

"Studies show that children who stay with a grandparent or relative have much better emotional and behavioral outcomes than those placed with a non-family member," she says.

Raising a child, however, can be expensive.

"For many kinship caregivers, income is limited and resources scarce, so they face a constant financial struggle," she says. "This is where I thought I could help, but I couldn't do it alone, so I approached my friend Kathy Terry about undertaking this project with me."

Terry quickly accepted Richter's proposal, which began nearly a year's work of planning, organizing and assembling a team around them in order to form a nonprofit entity, which launched in January. The name is Step Up Parents.

"Our mission is to provide financial assistance to kinship caregivers in New Hampshire who are raising the children of drug addicted parents," says Terry, who notes their objective now is to raise funds.



"We have already started with our individual donor campaign and will begin our corporate donation campaign very soon," she says. "We definitely plan on sponsoring at least one support group for kinship caregivers as this has been a request of many of the grandparents with whom we have spoken."

In addition to raising funds, Richter says they plan to collaborate with other nonprofits and agencies.

"We are in our infancy and know the value in learning from well-established and respected nonprofits," she says. "By collaborating with other nonprofits whose purposes and work align with ours, we can be more impactful to those in need and broaden our outreach much more quickly than we can on our own."

One nonprofit with whom Richter and Terry have already spoken is The Chase Home in Portsmouth. Founded in 1877, The Chase Home in Portsmouth is one of the oldest nonprofits in New Hampshire, serving more than 140 at-risk youth and their families annually statewide through prevention, intervention, residential and community-based programs.

"They work with some of the kids and families we want to help," says Richter. "It makes sense to work together."

Meme Wheeler, executive director at The Chase Home agrees and said she looks forward to working with Step Up Parents.

"They are addressing a real need in our community, one that often does not get the attention it deserves," she says. "We are very thankful for this new relationship we are building with them."

For Terry, everything they plan to do at Step Up Parents reflects their belief that these grandparents and relative caregivers who "step up" are everyday heroes.

"Studies show that children who stay with a grandparent or relative have much better emotional and behavioral outcomes than those placed with a non-family member," she says. "They have taken on this enormous task with little support. In addition to the everyday costs of raising a family, the added financial burden of legal fees and medical expenses can be crippling."

Her hope, she says, is that others in the community will "step up" to help them.

"We want to give back to these selfless people who have been through so much and have given back so much themselves," she says.

