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Sally and Don Goodrich hold a photograph of their son, Peter, at their Bennington home on Tuesday evening.

Cassandra Hotaling / Rutland Herald

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BENNINGTON — Sarah "Sally" Goodrich responded to the death of her son in the 9/11 terrorist attacks by starting a foundation that built an Afghan school.

Goodrich, whose response to 9/11 inspired many, died at the age of 65 Saturday from undisclosed causes at home with her family.

Gov. James Douglas was one of several hundred people who participated earlier this year in a celebration of the work Sally Goodrich and her husband, Don. On Monday, Douglas said their efforts were a reflection of the ethic and "spirit of Vermonters."

"No one has lived that ethic more fully than Sally Goodrich. She could have retreated after losing her son, but she took the opportunity to turn a family tragedy into something positive, to start an effort in his memory and use it to make a difference in the lives of people," he said.

Douglas said during his own visits to Afghanistan, he saw the ruins of schools that were destroyed because the Taliban didn't believe women should be educated.

"The kind of commitment that Sally made to give the young Afghans a chance at a better life is a high calling and one that I think will make the world a better place. I can't think of a better cause. I can't think of a more energetic advocate for peace in the world than Sally Goodrich. She devoted her life to making this world a better place," he said.

While many got to know Goodrich because of the work with the Peter M. Goodrich Memorial Foundation, she was also a teacher and a member of the Bennington School Board.

But for Don and Sally Goodrich, the personal loss suffered on 9/11 would become a life-changing, and ultimately, life-affirming experience.

Peter Goodrich, 33, was a passenger on United Airlines Flight 175, which was flown into the south tower of the World Trade Center.

Rush Filson, a childhood friend of Peter's who enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in response to the terrorist attacks, wrote a letter in August 2004 asking for help in supporting a school in Afghanistan where Filson was stationed.

"It was really like a door opening. I always call it a moment of grace. It was just this complete, amazing call toward not just collecting school supplies, but toward Afghanistan," Goodrich said in June.

After successfully collecting school supplies and sending them to Afghanistan, Don and Sally Goodrich decided to expand their efforts and develop the Peter M. Goodrich Memorial Foundation.

In April 2005, during Sally's first visit to Afghanistan, work on the school began. The two-story, 26-room, kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school was opened and dedicated in April 2006.

Sally continued to travel to Afghanistan every year, but stopped visiting the school in Logar because it had become too dangerous.

Stuart Hurd, town manager of Bennington, said he was impressed with how "incredibly courageous Sally Goodrich was to continue to travel back and forth from Afghanistan to the United States despite health issues.

"I think they were an amazing couple to take what happened on 9/11 and turn it into something truly positive as opposed to what some of the people, who didn't lose anyone, continue to do and that is to use it to foment hate," he said.

The work of the foundation in Afghanistan continued, however, through efforts such as buying agricultural land used to grow food and building a well in another village.

In a way, the effort came full-circle when the foundation went from bringing educational opportunities to Afghan children to bringing Afghan children to America, where they could pursue educational opportunities.

There are now 20 students from Afghanistan pursuing higher education in the United States thanks to the foundation's efforts. Students are responsible for finding a scholarship to pay for their tuition, but many of them ended up staying with Don and Sally Goodrich.

Sally Goodrich said in June most people she had spoken with were supportive of the family's efforts.

"I think everyone was looking for something positive and affirmative to do both in Afghanistan and in response to 9/11, and we became sort of a symbol for responding to 9/11 in a way that was not angry and that's because it was consistent with the way Pete lived his life, really," she said. The Rev. Kenneth Clarke, who will officiate at Goodrich's service Thursday at Old First Church, said he had known Sally for about a year.

"Sally could be defined a lot by the last years of her life. The last years of her life were the only times that allowed a lot of other people to see who she already was. ... The person we knew publicly in the last few years was somebody Sally always was, just in different context. She was a teacher, she was a lover of life, she was someone who saw and always went for what was joyful and spoke with absolute truth," he said.

A funeral service will take place at Old First Church in Old Bennington at 3 p.m. Thursday. An Irish celebration will follow at the church barn on Monument Circle. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Peter M. Goodrich Foundation.

More information about the foundation and its work can be found at www.goodrichfoundation.org.

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