

# The Salem News

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## A woman entrepreneur in a largely male arena

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STAFF WRITER

*Everyone's life has a story. In "Lives," we tell some of those stories about North Shore people who have died recently. "Lives" runs Mondays in The Salem News.*

MANCHESTER — When Susan Gilmore-Gallagher was dying from cancer, she insisted on traveling to Stowe, Vt., to visit the latest luxury home she had renovated.

Her doctors and even her minister said she was too sick to travel, but she went, with her children, her husband and a nurse.

"She said, 'Yes, I am going,'" her husband said. "She wanted to see that house and make sure the men did a good job renovating it."

She died two weeks later.

Gilmore-Gallagher was the former president and co-founder of East-West Mortgage in Peabody, known for the popular radio jingle "Call 1-800-East-West." She founded ISoldMyHouse.com with her husband and with him ran a luxury vacation rental business, buying and renovating multimillion-dollar homes in ski country and the Caribbean.

"She was very independent," said her sister, Darlene Gilmore-



Courtesy photo

### LIVES

#### SUSAN GILMORE-GALLAGHER

LaBonne. "She just enjoyed and took pride in all the detail of buying properties and fixing them up the way she wanted. No matter what anyone said, if she had a vision, she would make it happen."

Gilmore-Gallagher, 52, lived in Manchester with her husband, John Gallagher, and their three children, Jonathan, 17; Jennifer, 14; and Rachel, 11. By the time doctors diagnosed her with stomach cancer in July, it was in the most

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Courtesy photo

Susan Gilmore-Gallagher, left, and her husband, John Gallagher, center, took 30 East-West employees for a tour and a game at Fenway Park in Boston.

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advanced stage, and she died on Feb. 28.

Gilmore-Gallagher ran a successful mortgage firm for nearly 20 years in an industry dominated by male leadership.

"I don't think that bothered her," her husband said. "She wasn't afraid to pick up the phone and call anybody."

He said his wife pioneered working from home by capitalizing on the Internet early on. By the early 1990s, East-West had set up e-mail addresses and offered online applications, he said.

"After our first baby was born, we set up the Internet so she could do all the accounting from our house into East-West with phone lines," John Gallagher said.

At the mortgage company, which she and her husband opened in 1987, she eventually oversaw more than 300 employees. Her husband said she was "a

demanding taskmaster in business, but at the same time treated people very well."

"The last year we owned (East-West) we gave away 90 trips to the Caribbean to our employees," her husband said. "She made sure we gave them out in every single department, even the guy who takes the trash out."

"It was always to the most improved person, not necessarily the best. Susan was very big on people who would better themselves."

Gilmore-Gallagher grew up in a small town in west-central Massachusetts, the daughter of a nurse and a machinist. She attended Dean Junior College and Bryant College.

"She was very ambitious, very stubborn, actually," her sister said.

She detested her husband's penchant for expensive cars, he said.

"She always thought cars were

a big waste of money," he said. "I bought a bright yellow Ferrari, and she hated it. Susan always liked assets that appreciated, and cars depreciate."

Her sister recalled a cross-country trip when they were small children. They visited Yellowstone National Park, where Susan threw a tantrum "because she wasn't getting the attention she felt she deserved," and she threw her sneaker out on the geyser. Her father had to jump the railings and fetch the shoe before the geyser erupted, according to Gilmore-LaBonne, who laughed at the memory.

"She was a doer," John Gallagher said, "and if she made her mind up to do something, she did it. That made her a very good entrepreneur and a very good mommy to our kids."

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