

SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: Teodoro Rivera



Longtime Roseville Senior resident Teodoro Rivera is very involved in building activities and helpful to fellow residents and staff.

If you visit the Social Services office at Roseville Senior, chances are you'll also see Teodoro Rivera. The longtime resident's apartment is right across the hall and he's always willing to lend a hand to fellow residents and staff members.

"I would be lost without Teddy," said Roseville Senior Care Coordinator Gladys Artis. "He helps with everything."

Rivera is fluent in Spanish and will serve as an interpreter for residents who need it. He said he helps relay messages to and from staff members and offers to explain what happens during resident meetings to those who don't understand English well.

He also loves to cook and uses those skills to prepare food for various celebrations at Roseville Senior. When the meal for Thanksgiving fell through, Rivera bought a turkey for residents. He also helps distribute food from the food pantry to residents in need and aids the building superintendent when an alarm sounds.

"If we got five more Teddys we'd be good," Artis said.

Rivera was born in Puerto Rico and moved to Passaic, N.J., when he was a teenager in 1955. He was drafted during the Vietnam War and served from 1966 to 1967. He collects Vietnam Veterans hats, which he also wears. He currently has about 30.

"I'm proud of it because I served my country," he said.

Rivera moved to Roseville Senior in 1999. Though his daughter would like him to move in with her, he says he would rather live on his own.

"I won't move out of here. I tell my daughter, 'They'll call you when I kick the bucket,'" he said with a laugh.

Though Rivera said he's always laughing, he has experienced tough times during his life, including his service in Vietnam.

"I went through hell and back," he said. "I feel sorry for the ones who didn't make it."

While working as an assistant manager for a wallpaper company in Paterson, he hurt his back on the job. The injury was so severe, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs classified him as disabled. He received disability checks from the VA until he turned 65 and continues to get medical care from the organization, which he will have for life. He uses a chair massage and another medical device for his back and undergoes an MRI to determine a course of therapy.

Two of Rivera's grandsons died from ALD, a deadly genetic brain disorder that affects 1 in 18,000 people and most severely affects boys and men. The disease destroys the protective sheath around the nerve cells that allow people to think and control muscles. Rivera's grandsons went blind during the course of the disease, which can also cause deafness, seizures, loss of muscle control and progressive dementia.

"We went through hell," he said.

Despite the hardships he's experienced, at age 78, Rivera is thankful for what he has and gives back as much as he can.

"I laugh, smile and say hello to people," Rivera said. "I'm there for them."