

Seniors at The Palace Suites find fulfillment in volunteering

BY KERRY GREEN-PHILLIPS

Living in a retirement community offers opportunities to find fulfillment in volunteering. In addition to the satisfaction of helping others, studies have shown that the act of giving of one's time and talents may contribute to longevity.

According to research published online in the APA Journal Health Psychology, people who volunteer may live longer than those who don't, as long as their reasons for volunteering are to help others rather than themselves. This was the first time research has shown volunteers' motives can have a significant impact on life span. The study found that volunteers lived longer than people who didn't volunteer if they reported altruistic values or a desire for social connections as the main reasons for wanting to volunteer.

At The Palace Suites in Kendall, residents take advantage of their freedom from housework and cooking and the accessibility of the community's transportation to volunteer both within the community and throughout Miami Dade County.

Betty Carson has been a long-time volunteer at Baptist Hospital, located not far from the Kendall community. She works every Tuesday for four hours and has been volunteering at the hospital for almost 19 years.

"I started volunteering with their newborn cuddling program," she explained. "It was so rewarding rocking the babies. Once the program ended, I helped out wherever I was needed."

Carson said it makes her feel marvelous to be able to help others.

"I remember a woman in the hospital who was alone and crying," she said. "She was so afraid. I asked her how I could help and she said she would like to have a Bible. I found one in the chapel and brought it to her.

Her appreciation for this small act of kindness made me feel so good. From that point on, I was hooked as a volunteer. On Tuesdays, I may walk my feet off but I have a good feeling knowing I've done something positive for others."

Phyllis Ehrlich also finds satisfaction in



The Palace Suites' Betty Carson and Phyllis Ehrlich.

volunteering. Some of her efforts tap her expertise and years as a gerontologist. She serves as an ombudsman for the southern district of the State of Florida, handling crisis calls and assessing assisted living facilities and nursing homes.

She finds living at The Palace allows her to continue her life.

"I'm able to maintain an outside life and my many friends enjoy visiting The Palace," she said. "There are many interesting people to learn from and that I can relate to."

To share her love of reading, she facilitates a short story discussion group that she initiated for her neighbors.

"There was interest in having a book club at The Palace Suites but no one wanted to make the commitment to read a book every month," Ehrlich said. "Recognizing peoples' needs and interests, short stories seemed a perfect solution. We meet once a month and the class has taken off with flying colors."

Her other passion practices the philosophy she shared with her husband, Ira, and it's written on a piece of paper she carries with her: Our primary concern is for people who fall between the cracks of our society.

Helping the homeless in Miami Dade County is something Ehrlich also feels passionate about and she was happy to learn The Palace shared her desire to be of service to others. A representative from Chapman Partnership was invited to the active retirement community to explain the work of the organization and their needs, enabling residents to understand their plight. Ehrlich and The Palace's activity director, Adrian Cabrera, launched "Knock the Socks" based on the meeting.

Underway for six months, residents, families and employees are encouraged to donate new socks, t-shirts, underclothes and shoes for men, women and children and whatever is donated each month is doubled by The Palace.

Other residents also find satisfaction channeling their volunteering interests at The Palace and the community welcomes the diversity of interests.

"All someone needs to do is offer their time," said Cabrera. "We'll find something that fits their interests."

To learn more about The Palace Suites, visit www.ThePalace.org or call 305.271.2220.