

Sunrise Rotary Club brings joy to residents

By **Nubia Reyna** - **The Brownsville Herald** - December 12, 2020



By **NUBIA REYNA**
Staff Writer

For three decades, the Brownsville Sunrise Rotary Club has been celebrating the holidays at Alta Vista Rehabilitation and Healthcare where they take gifts, Santa Claus, a choir and food to the residents.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the strong restrictions to keep residents safe, the club was not able to enter the facility but still decided to take the gifts and bring a Santa so he could say hi through the glass doors to the more than 70 residents at Alta Vista.

"Today is a very special day for them," Norma Guerrero, executive director at Alta Vista, said. "As you know, our residents are not having any visitors, so just the fact that Santa is able to make his way out here and have these gifts for them means a lot. They are excited, they're eager and we would love to see Santa inside. Unfortunately, due to the circumstances we are not allowed to do that."

Stan Petritis, who has been a member of the club for almost 30 years, said at first the event was small. With no Santa or choir included but eventually the event got bigger and bigger. Last year, the club started to also celebrate at Whispering Palms and said it is important to continue hosting this event as a way of thanking the elderly.

"Twenty-five years ago I was here with my kids. They were young, and we had the choir from the Episcopal Day School to sing and ever since then it just became natural for me to do this project, to be the head of the project," he said.

“ Last year we started another one, Whispering Palms, and we did the same thing. We brought the choir in, we brought Santa in, for both places. I enjoy doing it, for the people here. We are all going that way and I always enjoy doing this because I see the people here and if we could, we would go to every resident here and make sure they have a gift. I just feel inside me a drive to help these people and that’s why I keep doing it, plus having the support of other Rotarians in the club, it just makes it so much easier because I’m not doing it all myself.”

Betty Pizana, president for this term, said this tradition is important, especially during COVID-19, to let the residents know that they’re not forgotten.

“ We want to give a little joy, so the residents can feel a difference because we know that due to COVID, they have more restrictions and people can’t visit inside the building,” she said. “We are here to tell them that we don’t forget them and we want to make a difference in their life with a present from us that we are giving with all of our heart.”

Andy Hagan, past District 5930 governor for the Rotary Club, said now due to COVID-19 the tradition has changed a lot but that hopefully by next year things will be better so the choir and more attendees can come and celebrate.

“ We have done this over the last three decades and it’s a tradition now,” he said.

“ Just remembering all those who are here and extending personal items. We got Christmas cards for them. Generally speaking, we would invite the Episcopal Day School, there would be a choir here and they would have students from the various high schools represented, as well as UTRGV with another affiliated Rotary. They would all be here to help sing, distribute gifts and treat our residents to cookies. But because of our situation with COVID we wanted to be very respectful and with an abundance of caution.”

nreyna@brownsvilleherald.com

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Nubia Reyna is a reporter for The Brownsville Herald. She lives with her two dogs, Pinky and Blue, and spends most of her free time reading feminist books. She can be reached at nreyna@brownsvilleherald.com

