

KENDALL GAZETTE

Ask Helen



Hispanic Seniors Prefer Living On Their Own

BY HELEN SHAHAM

Q. *My mother has a friend living at the Palace Suites and is interested in joining her, but I understand that the population is mostly not Hispanic, and I'm concerned she will be uncomfortable.*

A. Seven years ago the Palace Suites was only about 5 percent Hispanic. Today it's 25 percent. Why the big change?

We sat down for lunch with a dozen residents of the Palace Suites, mostly Cuban women in their 80's, to find out.

We expected to learn that the culture had changed. Where once it was unthinkable for a Hispanic family to put their parents in a "home," even though it was the best thing for Mom and Dad, today they are thinking more like other Americans and find this an acceptable alternative. Or that's what we thought.

We were wrong!

Instead, we find out from these Hispanic residents of the Palace Suites that the change has come from the parents. They are the ones who want to come to the Palace! They don't want to live with their children anymore! "I visit my daughter for a weekend

and she wants me to stay the whole week," said one of the women. "But I say no, thank you, I love to visit you, but it's time to go home."

"I do not want to live with my daughter and her family," said another woman. "It's their life, and I feel like I get in the way. While they love me and try hard to make me feel welcome, I always feel like I'm intruding. It's not my kitchen, not my furniture, not my house. Here, I have my own apartment, sleep when I feel like it, watch TV when I feel like it, entertain friends whenever I want without having to check with anyone. This is my home."

We learned that the word has gotten out as one person moves in, and then their friends come to visit, and soon they are moving in, also. While in the beginning we were concerned that the relatively few Latin residents were having trouble making friends, now they have friends everywhere.

The residents love the independence they find at the Palace Suites, which is our residence for Independent Living in Kendall, where each resident has their own apartment and comes and goes as they please. Some still drive, others take the Palace shuttle bus to shopping. Many use the Palace limousine service, a spacious Cadillac which, for a modest price, takes one or more residents out to a favorite restaurant or perhaps a movie.

Breakfast and a gourmet dinner are provided daily at the Palace Suites, as is nightly entertainment. When something in the apartment needs fixing, the job is done by a familiar staff person, not a stranger.

"We feel safe here, and our families don't worry so much," another woman said.

Also interesting, as we went around the room learning about the participants, almost every one of these residents arrived in the United States in 1960. If you want to know what happened to the cream of Cuban society after the Revolution, they are all here, living at the Palace!

Doctors, engineers, college professors, all had to uproot their lives 46 years ago and flee to the United States. All of them at the time already were adults in their late 30's and early 40's, all with successful established lives. Each of them has interesting stories to tell about how their lives changed, and how they were welcomed to the United States. We are so happy to have them living with us!

Helen Shaham and her husband Jacob have been operating retirement communities for nearly 30 years. The Palace Suites in Kendall is a luxury Independent Living Community for active seniors. In addition, The Palace at Kendall campus is home to two Assisted Living Residences and a Nursing & Rehab Center. They also operate The Palace Gardens Assisted Living Community in Homestead, Homestead Manor Nursing Home and The Palace @ Home, a Medicare Certified Home Health Agency. Their two newest projects are The Palace at Weston – luxury living for those 55 and over, and The Palace Tel-Aviv, a continuing care retirement community in Israel. They have two communities under development – The Palace at Weston Senior Living and The Palace at Coral Gables. More information can be found on the company website, www.thepalace.org or by calling 305-270-7000.