

Frank Martinez, always there to help

80-year-old could be
an expert on business,
volunteer matters

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ST. PETERS

Frank Martinez has pulled himself up by his bootstraps, and through service, he helps others do that, too.

"I always volunteer in the community," said Martinez, 80.

The St. Peters man volunteers with and serves on the boards of several St. Charles County organizations.

He lends his time and money to organizations such as Youth in Need, which is in St. Charles.

"My pay has always been that I provided a service to someone," he said. "It takes time and resources to be able to help others."

Born in Peoria, Ariz., Martinez was an orphan by age 10, he said. He grew up very poor during the Great Depression.

"My mom died when I was 5 years old, and when I was 10, my dad died," he said. "Welfare provided for me."

On his 17th birthday, Martinez said, he dropped out of high school and signed up with the U.S. Marine Corps. He stayed for 23 years.

"I stayed because they were providing three squares and a fluff," Martinez said, referring to three square meals a day and a comfortable place to sleep at night.

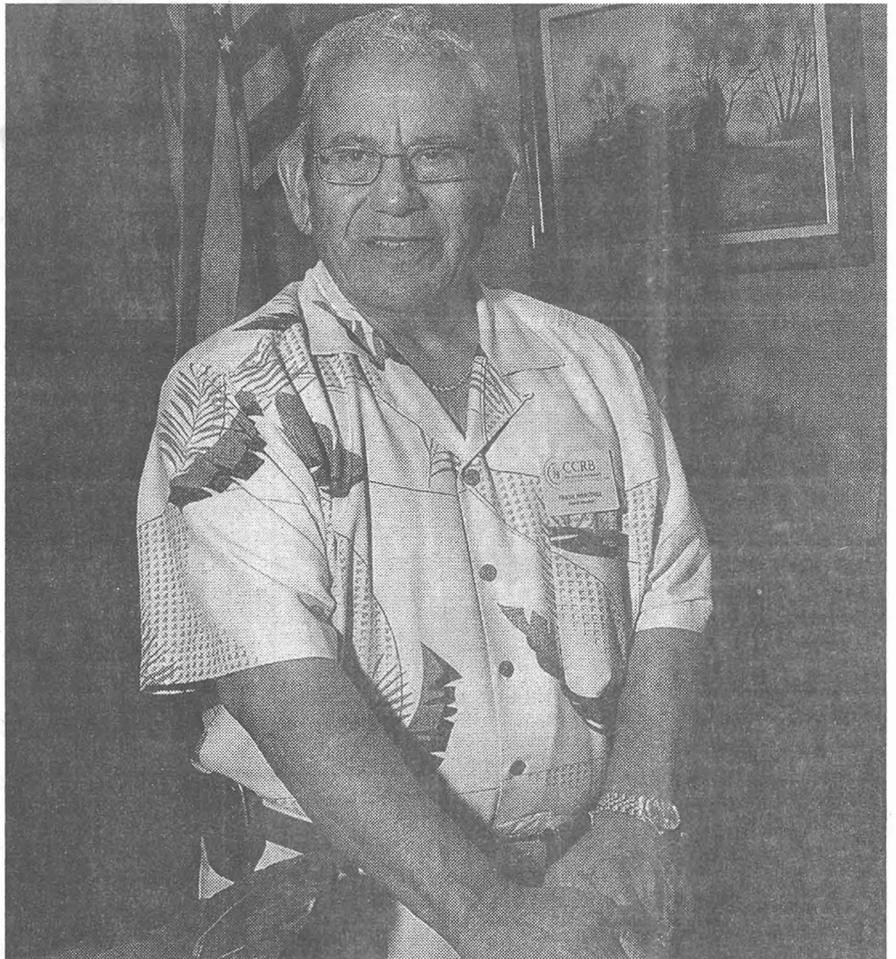
The Marines took Martinez on a trip around the world, but it was in St. Louis where his life began to change.

There he met and married his wife of 54 years, Charline, and moved to Hazelwood, Martinez said.

"When I met her, she gave me a fictitious phone number, so I found where she worked and called her," he said. "She said, 'If a guy is that determined to meet me, then I'd go ahead and go out with him.'"

The couple moved to Lake Saint Louis in 1979 and has lived in St. Peters since 1985.

Martinez said he owes his ferocious volunteering spirit to his wife.



ROY SYKES PHOTO

Frank Martinez never ceases to lend a helping hand where it is needed most. He volunteers with several community organizations throughout St. Charles County.

"I owe a lot to her because she's made the difference in my life," he said.

The couple has three children, Steve Martinez, Patricia Dietrich and Linda Martinez, and eight grandchildren.

"We bought a children's retail store because of the grandchildren," Martinez said. "My wife, my daughter Linda and I ran it (with locations) at Mid Rivers (Mall), West Port Plaza and Alton Square Mall."

In 1995, former U.S. Sen. Jim Talent selected Martinez as a state delegate for a White House conference on small business,

he said.

Martinez's entrepreneurial business career spans 28 years, and throughout that time he has managed to provide community service to churches, scout troops, chambers of commerce and nonprofit organizations.

"I have received so many awards for my work that when I repainted (the walls in) my house, I didn't want to put them all back up," he said.