

St. Martin volunteers give back to others

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — Betty Wiley, 60, gently stirred string beans and ham slices in a large pot in the kitchen at St. Martin's Place, where free meals are served five days a week to people in need. When asked where she learned her cooking skills, Wiley, a native of Georgia, said she had no choice but to learn, given the size of her family.

"I had eight brothers and eight sisters," she said. "We had to cook."

She said various groups helped her family with clothes and food when it was struggling to make ends meet as she was growing up.

"I said when I got older, it's good to give back," Wiley noted.

And give back she has, volunteering for the past decade at St. Martin's, where she works from 8:30 a.m. to noon Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Along the way, she's said she's learned to deal with all types of personalities.

"I got to be very patient since I started working here," Wiley said. "People come to this building every day. Some of them are rotten mean and stressed out or thrown away in life. (Volunteers) talk to them during meal time."



Mike Crup/Catholic Courier

Volunteer Basilia Rivera unloads clean dishes Oct. 8 during lunch hour at St. Martin's Place in Rochester.

Wiley said there are rewards in being patient with people who may not be as fortunate as she is.

"I enjoy it because I see a lot of smiles on people's faces," she said. "People who don't have a place to prepare their own food. A lot of people who come here live outside every day."

She added that she enjoys working with such women religious as Sister of St. Joseph Clare Ehmann, who oversees St. Martin's with Sis-

ter of St. Joseph Fran Sweeney as well as Joanne Corcimiglia.

"The sisters are strong, and they're teaching me a lot," Wiley said.

The feeling is mutual, according to Sister Ehmann, who has worked at St. Martin's for seven years.

"Betty has not missed a day," Sister Ehmann said. She added that Wiley and fellow volunteer Basilia Rivera are "very faithful, compassionate, loving women who are here every day to serve."

Like Wiley, Rivera, a Puerto Rican native, said she volunteers at St. Martin's because she wants to give back to the community. For a time, Rivera and her husband lived in Mount Carmel Apartments, low-income units which are owned by

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish and managed by Providence Housing Development Corp., a not-for-profit affiliate of diocesan Catholic Charities. St. Martin's is located next to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church.

"It was a good, safe secure place," Rivera, 63, said of the apartment. Rivera added that she had also visited St. Martin's as a guest before starting to volunteer there in 1998.

"I saw what was happening here, and I wanted to give this service as a gift," she said. "People who are helping here are good people. I liked the people. I also like the people who come here as guests."

Rivera noted that she does preparation work in the kitchen, cleans it and washes dishes, adding that she works at St. Martin's 16 hours a week. Rivera scoffed at the idea that she was sacrificing anything by volunteering at St. Martin's. Her husband works, she said, leaving her home alone during the day, and she doesn't care much for TV.

"I have to do something," she said. "I do it here because it needs to be done."

After a little cajoling, however, she acknowledged there are reasons beyond simply needing distractions in her life that motivate her to devote herself to others.

"I have to do something for somebody, and that's faith," she said.

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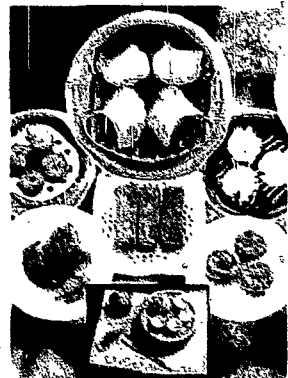
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