

Living Legend Award

Thirty years of dedication is impressive for any regular employee, but for volunteer Mina Daffinee, it is even more remarkable. She has been helping seniors in Plano since before the Plano Senior Recreation Center started. Her years of volunteering spanned three locations and three directors. For the past 30 years, Mina has put in thousands of volunteer hours, while becoming an exercise teacher, coach, friend and even counselor to many of the individuals.

She moved to Plano with her husband and two teenage daughters in 1982 and felt inspired by a close relationship with her grandmother to make a difference working with seniors. That relationship motivated her to work with citizens both at the Plano Senior Recreation Center and the Douglass Community Center, with the goal of helping seniors lead healthy, independent lives. "I did not want to work in a nursing home," she said. "I wanted to make a difference to keep people out of nursing homes!"

Carolyn Bowers, Administrative Assistant, at the Plano Senior Recreation Center has been with the center for 20 years and has known Daffinee during her entire tenure at the center as well. "Mina Daffinee ... wow! She is everyone's dream volunteer," Bowers said. "She has been with the center longer than any staff member. She was one of the original volunteers!" Bowers said that Daffinee was one of the volunteers who started a seniors' group meeting at a local Episcopal church. After experiencing rapid growth, the group was offered meeting space in an old Plano Parks and Recreation facility. "That building became the first Plano Senior Center," Bowers said. "It grew until we had to have a new building."

Daffinee's work began by helping with card parties, square dance lessons, line dancing and trips. However, her tasks expanded rapidly and soon there was not a section of the Center that remained un-touched by Mina's helping hands. From fitness to discussion groups, she's influenced every aspect of the Center. As time went on, she began to lead line dancing, took groups to nursing homes to visit with other seniors, started a men's conversation group, developed and taught an arm chair exercise group, and created an adventure Friday which included lunch and a movie. Daffinee has also served as a supervisor for many of the center's local and more extended travel groups. She has moderated a conversational group for men about items in history that participants lived through.

She also teaches a variety of classes, including Tai Chi and armchair exercise. She developed the arm chair exercise program for participants who can't stand up. "I've had people who have come in with breathing machines and walkers and it has helped them," Daffinee said. "It is geared to help them strengthen their muscles, stimulate their brain and work on range of motion." Dafinee did everything in her power to ensure no senior went without the opportunity to lead full and healthy lives. Year after year times 30, Mina fully devoted herself not only to seniors but to educating herself as well. She spent many hours of study and many dollars taking classes and earning certifications which would benefit the senior center participants. "And there's nothing better you can do than enrich your life by giving of yourself. You actually do receive more than you give."

Now retired, Mina participates in many of the activities she developed and once led. She joins in the many exercise classes, discussion groups and trips she once helped create that wouldn't be around if it weren't for her countless hours of dedication. The Senior Center and the City of Plano appreciate Mina Daffinee for the countless hours of dedication she gave to make seniors lives fuller and healthier for the past 30 years.