

# SERVICE WITH A SMILE

MANUEL RODRIGUEZ FOLLOWED HIS DREAM OF COMING TO CALIFORNIA AND WORKED HIS WAY TO NEWPORT BEACH COUNTRY CLUB, WHERE HE SERVES MEMBERS AT THE GRILL.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

There are two things that Manuel Rodriguez holds near and dear to his heart: his job and his family.

His story starts in Mexico, where he grew up working on his father's farm for most of his life. Always filled with the drive to succeed, Rodriguez attended school, as well, fitting in his classes around his family's farming schedule: If he was on the farm in

the morning, he'd go to school in the evenings, and vice versa.

Then he decided to try something new. He traveled to California, an area where he says many people from his region of Mexico live. "When I came here for the first time, I was planning to stay only for like a month," Rodriguez explains. But after realizing how much he loved this western state,

he wanted to extend his stay.

Rodriguez faced some struggles trying to get the visa he would need to stay and ended up going back to Mexico after a year. But he had already made up his mind—he'd find a way to come back.

"When I was [wanting] ... to get married, I was thinking of raising my kids in California because the area is much better here than in Mexico," he says of wanting to return to the state. "That was a big reason: to bring my kids here. Plus ... the area is beautiful. It's the best place to live."

Now, he lives happily in the city of Santa Ana with his wife of 34 years and their three adult children. The close-knit family recently gained an addition when Rodriguez's youngest child had a son—his first grandchild, whom Rodriguez lovingly calls his "cutie."

Aside from spending time at home with the family, Rodriguez says that he has two great passions. "One of my big hobbies is [maintaining] my backyard," he says, noting that he has a wide range of plants and fruit trees that he nurtures. When he isn't gardening, Rodriguez says he loves to fish on local lakes, including Irvine Lake and the Santa Ana River Lakes.

Even though he has so much to fulfill him at home, Rodriguez says that his job is also very special to him. Having previously worked many jobs doing everything from construction to hospitality, including a long-running stint at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Costa Mesa, Rodriguez says that he gets the most enjoyment out of being able to



interact with and help the country club's members.

"I like to be face-to-face with the people and chat with them," noting that he feels it's his duty to help the club's guests in any way he can. Spending five days a week at the club has allowed Rodriguez to get to know many of the members, whom he has been able to help in a variety of ways, from answering their questions and retrieving things that they need to pinpointing solutions for some of the personal issues they face.

"I feel so good when they come to me and they give me a hug and say, 'Thank you so much,'" he says. "... I feel so fortunate because when they call my name and they're joking with me, I feel like they are family to me."

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Aside from helping members themselves, Rodriguez says he arrives in the morning with enough time to prepare everything in the restaurant, so that it's all in place when the first members come in to eat. He spends his days serving at the club's grill but, in the two years that he has worked at the Newport Beach Country Club,

his job has come to mean so much more to him.

"Every day when I'm going to work there, I feel like I'm going to do something I enjoy," he explains. "... The life God has given to me is a gift and I'm glad for that gift. My job and my family: These are the two things I really enjoy."

