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Your Local Connection

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## Lifelong friends find passion in working with older adults

BY KERRY GREEN-PHILLIPS

Elizabeth Martinez and Stefanie Fisher, members of The Palace's sales team, had no idea their fate as best friends had been sealed over 90 years ago on the island nation of Cuba, some 300-plus miles away from where they eventually would meet in Miami.

The pair, who is helping to welcome older adults and their families to The Palace's newest community — The Palace Weston, first met in middle school more than 25 years ago, when they were 12 years old. They quickly formed a friendship after realizing their homes were in close proximity to each other.

"We began spending a lot of time at each other's houses," Fisher said. "When I first visited, her dad was making Cuban burgers, and I fell in love with her family."

Soon, Fisher and Martinez's families became friends and the girls discovered their grandfathers had been friends in Cuba.

The pals stayed in touch throughout middle and high school and would often spend time volunteering at The Palace's continuum of care campus in Kendall. At the assisted living community, The Palace Renaissance, Martinez served ice cream and called bingo while Fisher learned about nursing, helping in their certified nursing assistant program.

After developing a passion for working with seniors, Martinez accepted a job in 2001, serving as a training coordinator. Fisher joined the company the following year as a marketing assistant.

While Martinez continued working at The Palace, taking on new challenges as she was promoted, Fisher opted to jump to the hospitality field, working in various positions with local Miami hotels, including group sales.

Martinez met her future husband, Ricky Martinez, at The Palace and they married in 2007. It was natural that Fisher was her maid of honor, and for Fisher's wedding in 2010, Martinez returned the honor. Coincidentally, in 2012, when Martinez found that she was pregnant, Fisher found that she was pregnant two weeks later.

Martinez was eventually tapped to lead the sales team at The Palace at Coral Gables, assisting with the luxury active retirement community's leasing. She was then promoted to The Palace Gardens in Homestead, serving as director of marketing.

"I've learned you don't say no when opportunities are offered," she said.

When the company targeted her for a move to the new Weston community, she was ready despite an hour commute. Coincidentally, Fisher was living in Weston, having taken maternity leave from Cartier, where she was working as a sales coach and assistant manager to have her second son.

Martinez felt Fisher would be the perfect addition to The Palace at Weston sales team and encouraged her to apply for the position.



Stefanie Fisher and Elizabeth Martinez, part of The Palace's sales team, share passion for working with older adults.

"I started planting the seeds with everyone that I wanted to re-join The Palace," Fisher said. "I told my former boss, Adam Rosenblum, that I had more maturity now and experience."

As any best friend would, Martinez gave Fisher tips to put her at ease and helped her ace the interview.

"I'm working with my best friend and feel so much happiness coming to work," Martinez said.

They both feel so blessed to be part of The Palace team and the family-atmosphere owners Helen and Jacob Shaham have created.

"There's a real purpose behind what we do," Fisher added. "We both share in our love of helping people and truly believe people will be happy living at The Palace."