Aurora Ortiz was born in September 1942 as the fourth child out of 12. Her family was poor and in bad health, so she spent most of her youth in orphanage type missions. At age 55, she had multiple accidents because of her visual impairment. To cope with the disability, she attended the Blind Community Center where a new world immediately opened up. She is now the center’s Volunteer Coordinator as well as a dedicated member. She is committed to helping the Center survive and thrive.

**Why did you decide to volunteer with the Blind Community Center?**

I heard about the Blind Community Center when I was receiving daily living skills training, so I could learn to function as a visually impaired woman. When I arrived, I was exposed to a new world. I tried surfing, horse-back-riding, fishing, and running. The Center gave me these new experiences. When volunteer opportunities opened up, I was enthusiastic to participate.

**You embraced volunteering wholeheartedly. You became a leader at the Center. Tell us about your leadership roles.**

Currently, I participate in marathons to help the Center as a means of publicity and fundraising. I also serve as the maintenance and transportation manager as well as a Volunteer Coordinator. Through this, I strive to involve people of all races, creeds, and abilities in the Blind Community Center. We also interact with National Charity Leagues, Kids’ Korps and Lions; just to name a few. I am dedicated to the Center, and will do anything for its survival.

**What contributions are you most proud of?**

I am most proud of the fact that I have given over 12 years of dedicated service. I have done everything from cleaning to fundraising. I put in 16-hour days, 7 days a week. I am also proud of raising over $145,000 for the Blind Community Center’s transportation needs. Without transportation, many of our participants would be shut-ins at home. I know that our transportation has been a major contribution to their self-esteem.

Ortiz running in a promo picture for fundraising on behalf of the Blind Community Center. This was to raise money for BCC’s transportation costs.

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I am additionally proud to have started a blind senior students/volunteer lunch program for our craft class students, who are mostly diabetic and need to have a healthy meal at the proper time in order to function throughout the day. Over time, we gained volunteers and the program is successful. Although I am just a volunteer, I am proud to have made a difference.

**What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome in order to volunteer?**

I am an extremely shy person. I have had to put myself out there, which is very difficult for me. My disability posed a major challenge for me. In addition to being blind, I’m hearing impaired. I’ve been rejected and laughed at many times.

**Despite these barriers, you moved forward. What inspired your persistence?**

I have a strong faith. I feel, however, that my recovery from an accident, in which I almost lost a leg, was a major factor in my volunteering. I felt that God has saved my leg for a purpose, and I knew that I was meant to serve the Blind Community Center.

**Oftentimes people report that giving service is as rewarding for the giver as it is for the receiver. What rewards did you receive?**

I have received friendship, self-esteem, and a sense of family. I feel useful and capable. I have gained leadership skills. Every day I want to learn something new to keep myself mentally alert and motivated. I have gotten involved with the retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) as a member and participant. Life doesn’t stop at 55.

**What do you hope to do in the future?**

I hope to continue to expand the Center’s ability to serve the Blind Community. I also want to continue my full-inclusion programs; thus increasing the Center’s involvement with the able bodied community.

**What is the most important lesson you have learned from volunteering that you would like to share with others who may have disabilities or are considering including volunteers with disabilities?**

I have learned to be patient, tolerant and to persevere. I also have learned to focus on peoples’ abilities rather than their disabilities.

**“Blind people do not die of blindness, they can die of loneliness. Transportation is essential so that they don’t sit at home to vegetate.” - Aurora Ortiz**

The picture was taken when Pfizer La Jolla’s, department of global research and development came to do one of the projects of maintenance at the BCC. They continued helping for about 8 years.

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