

# Local citizen helps dying man's last wish come true

By **FANNIE SUNSHINE**  
The Champion

Salvador 'Mexican Joe' Castaneda's dying wish was to see his family one last time.

And thanks to Gabriele Pelusi, his wish was fulfilled.

When Mr. Castaneda was diagnosed with liver cancer at the beginning of the new year, doctors gave him a maximum of four months to live.

In mid-January, Mr. Castaneda, who had worked at Quality Greens on Main Street for the past 18 years, asked Mr. Pelusi, fellow employee and produce manager, to take him to his homeland in Mexico City so he could see his family and give his final farewell.

"He had no friends or family here," Mr. Pelusi said.

"He begged me to take him home. He said he knew it was a lot of money but he wanted to see his two sisters and their families one last time."

Two weeks later, Mr. Pelusi and Mr. Castaneda boarded a plane and travelled to the village of Quetzaltenango, in Guatemala City.

"I managed to find some money in his account and people here would give money here and there, but I mostly paid for the trip out of my own pocket," said Mr. Pelusi,



**Salvador Castaneda was able to see his family in Mexico before he passed away thanks to a sympathetic co-worker.**

adding the trip cost close to \$2,000. "He kept saying 'thank you very much' over and over, like a thousand times."

He said Mr. Castaneda's family was grateful he arranged to have Mr. Castaneda come back for one final visit.

"They were really happy. All the villagers and the priest thanked me."

Mr. Pelusi said Mr. Castaneda was in good spirits the day they arrived and told story after story to his family, who never left his side.

But three days later, Mr.

Castaneda slipped into a coma and never regained consciousness.

He died surrounded by his family February 6 at the age of 62.

"His family had a (head) stone and plot prepared just in case," Mr. Pelusi said. "They didn't think he would die there but they made arrangements just in case. He told me he wanted to die in his country."

Mr. Pelusi said he didn't think twice when his dying friend asked to be taken to Mexico.

"I feel really good because I did a good deed, emotionally and spiritually. My pastor said it was good mission work."

Mr. Castaneda will be remembered as a dedicated, hard working employee, who rarely missed a day's work.

"I had a lot of respect for Joe," Mr. Pelusi said.

"He was very well educated and didn't care about material things. He was a real gentleman who loved photography, books, and the Mexican cha-cha. He was like part of the furniture around here."

Although Mr. Castaneda had a relatively short visit with his family, it was time well spent, Mr. Pelusi said.

"This story has a beautiful ending."



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