

VOLUNTEER MENTALITY

Retiree's dedication to service never stopped



Sam Riti has served as a high school basketball referee since 1972.

Sam Riti has had many opportunities to serve in his lifetime, and he's taken them.

Riti, a retired member of Yonkers, NY Branch 387, served in the Army from 1966 to 1968.

"I was accepted to go to college, but then I received my draft notice," he said. "I wasn't ready for college. So, I said, 'I'm drafted, let me go.'"

"I just served and did whatever they had me do," he added.

Riti was stationed at Fort Hood, TX, where his duties included testing new weapons.

"I was in the artillery with the big guns, the howitzers, which had the capability to fire nuclear warheads," he said. Riti had a security clearance for his work with testing weapons.

For a couple of months, Riti also went for a special detail at Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland, where experiments were conducted on soldiers.

"They would whack them with LSD and see what the effects were," he said. Riti was never a subject in the LSD tests, but he did test gas masks and gas weapons.

He and other soldiers went into a sealed chamber with a gas mask on. "They tell you, 'Rip off your mask,' " he recalled, " 'and see how long you can stay.' You had some of these guys go in there, and I don't know what was going through their head. They would try to stay there as long as they possibly could."

Riti did what he was asked to do, but fled the gas when it was time. "I'd walk in, take it off, and walk out," he said. "I wasn't looking to be a hero."

He also tested more conventional weapons, like a unique gun.

"It was a gun that was fired like a Gatling gun, but it was a grenade launcher," he said. "We had to write

reports on how we thought it could help the soldiers, our troops in Vietnam."

"My report was it was negative for a foot soldier because you needed someone to carry the tripod, someone to carry the weapon, the gun, and then someone to carry the ammunition," he said. "So, it was something that, the way I wrote it up, it should have been mounted on either a moving vehicle or one of the helicopters that we were using. And they could just fire away because you could shoot 60 grenades a minute."

After modifications, some of the weapons Riti tested went on to be used by U.S. forces in Vietnam.

From the military, Riti went straight to the Post Office in Yonkers, where he was born and grew up. He carried the mail in Yonkers for the next 37 years until he retired in 2006.

In all that time, on and off his route, Riti has served his community. Sometimes Riti finds ways to help people, and sometimes they find him.

"Over the years, like on the route, I saved two lives," he said. "Another time, I caught burglars on the route."

The first life he saved was a young boy choking on candy.

"He was with two or three other kids, and they were walking, and all of a sudden he was getting all black and blue," Riti said. "So, I ran across the street. I picked the kid up, popped him, you know, I even turned him upside down. That's how small he was. And I was shaking him and the thing came out." He later saved another choking person using the Heimlich maneuver.

Then there was the time a propane tank exploded in a shed with a man inside.

"I was out delivering and I hear an explosion," Riti recalled. "And this guy, the fellow that was in there, there was

flames, there was a fire.” He helped the man out of the shed and called 911.

He recalls stopping burglars because he knew his route so well. “I was in a residential area, and when I saw strange cars and strange people, I waited till I got to the next house and I said, ‘Do me a favor, call the first precinct. Tell them Sammy said there’s some strange people out here.’” Police came and caught the burglars in the act.

He saved another life after he retired. At the Yonkers Raceway Casino, he said, “a person was choking and I did the Heimlich on him.” The EMTs said he had likely saved the man’s life.

Riti remembers being so trusted that postal patrons on his route gave him access to their houses.

“They’d give me the key to their house and say, ‘Sam, we’re going down to Florida. Any of my mail, if you think it’s important, if you want to send it down, send it down.’” he said. “The trust that people have...to me, that’s a lot.”

Over the years, Riti has found many other ways to do good things for other people.

He has volunteered for AMVETS as a commander at his local AMVETS Post 40 in Yonkers. Founded in 1944 and chartered by an act of Congress, AMVETS has more than 250,000 members and exists to enhance the quality of life for all American veterans, their families and survivors by providing assistance, jobs and services to veterans and their communities. Riti was named New York AMVETS Veteran of the Year twice, a national AMVETS Veteran of the Year, and received the President’s Lifetime Achievement Award for his volunteer service—a recognition of his more than 4,000 hours of volunteer service.

He’s organized many blood drives at the Yonkers Post Office. He has bought



Riti in his Army uniform

turkeys at Thanksgiving to give away to charities. He has served as a high school basketball referee since 1972. He has been a shop steward, church usher, vice president of the Yonkers YMCA board and vice president of the USPS Federal Credit Union.

To top it off, he’s the retiree liaison for his branch. Riti has set an example for how a retiree can give back.

Riti credits his mother with inspiring him.

“One thing she taught us: You’re not better than anyone and nobody’s better than you,” Riti said. “And if you could ever help somebody, do a favor—do it. As long as I can do something and somebody comes to me and says, ‘Sam, can you help me?’ I’ll try to do it.” **PR**