José and Evie Zambrana are recent transplants to San Antonio. They met 50 years ago as teens at a party in their hometown of Queens, N.Y. They worked in New York City and Pennsylvania, until they followed their daughter, Melissa, and her family to San Antonio last year. The vibrant couple brought their ministry, Debt Free in Christ, to San Antonio, teaching financial responsibility and debt freedom. José serves as associate pastor at New Vision Community Church of the Nazarene and will be ordained this spring.

José spent 33 years with the Con Ed utility company, which controls all the steam in Manhattan. In northeastern cities like New York City, steam turbines generate electricity for the city, José explained. The excess steam cannot be released into the rivers, because the water’s temperature would kill the wildlife, so it is distributed through pipes under the city streets, providing air conditioning, hot water and heat. If the pressure is improperly managed, pipes will explode.

One of José’s responsibilities at Con Ed was to check the giant steam valve named Big Bertha, located under the former World Trade Center Building One. It was so large, it took six men to open the valve, he said. He narrowly escaped tragedy during the first trade center attack in 1993. His normal routine would have placed him right where the bomb detonated, but providentially, he was working a later shift that day. José was called upon to help restore the steam back to the North Tower after the bombing. Due to his trustworthiness, he was given a key to the freight elevator of the Tower so he could gain access at any time to service the steam station. José still carries the key today.

His expertise proved invaluable in 2001. When the towers fell, the steam system from 14th Street south was destroyed, José said. The utility company needed to release the pressure from all the valves across the city to prevent possible ruptures.

“We were basically saving Manhattan from blowing up,” he said. “I was actually at war. I spent a lot of days sleeping on top of my desk in the office because I was too busy to go home.”

Evie was teaching 3rd grade and remembers the miracle of being able to assure the safety of her son, who was working in Manhattan that day. She was talking with him as he watched the second plane hit, so she knew the news before it was even reported.

The couple enjoys the freedom from home maintenance they’ve found at Independence Village and its convenient location. José brought portable pickleball equipment and is recruiting friends to play the game. Evie loves their porch, where she can enjoy viewing the mature trees and flowers from her newly installed swing.