I t was a typical morning in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where Steve and Betty Wells managed a hotel, when word came of planes crashing into the World Trade Center. Rather than watch the recovery efforts on television, the couple, then in their 60s, volunteered to go to Ground Zero.

“ Seems like it was yesterday,” says Steve, who now lives with Betty at Independence Hill Retirement Community in San Antonio. “It was so obvious there was a need.” The couple had long volunteered with the Red Cross Disaster Response Team. So just days after 9/11, they spent two weeks in downtown Manhattan with the Red Cross, handing out nourishing food to recovery workers. “We stayed in an old airport hangar over in Brooklyn and went down there every day,” remembers Betty.

Today, Steve and Betty, both 86, still volunteer. They recently reprised their roles as Mr. And Mrs. Claus for the Independence Hill community. With a twinkle in his eye, Steve's a natural as Old St. Nick, and throughout the year he's known for handing out candy to residents and visitors. The couple serves on the community’s Meet and Greet Committee, and Betty sings with the Hill Toppers choral group.

The Wellses married in 1952 after a romance that blossomed in an unlikely place: Washington, D.C.'s Walter Reed Medical Center. A master sergeant in the Army, Steve was on temporary duty there after recovering from an injury. Betty worked there as a 2nd Lt. Occupational Therapist in the Air Force.

“I offered to give her a ride to the train station, and that was the beginning,” Steve says.

After 20 years in the Army, Steve, a former Eagle Scout, worked for 20 years with the Boy Scouts of America as a camp director in the Catskills. The couple’s three daughters and two sons watched their mom and dad serve the campers, living out the values that scouting promotes.

Today, the couple has lunch at daughter Kathy Walsh’s house in San Antonio every Sunday. She looks in often and enjoys reminiscing with them about her parents’ long lifetime of service.

Prepared to Volunteer

After a lifetime of service in different ways, Independence Hill residents Steve and Betty Wells can’t stop giving back.