Lanny Dante saw the world in his years of U.S. Navy service and as an Army “brat.” Subsequently, he enjoys regaling acquaintances and young relatives with tales of his adventures. As a teen, he played on the basketball team on the Army base in Ethiopia, where his family was stationed. Amazingly, his flight home was forced to reroute to avoid the 6-day war in Beirut. When Lanny reached U.S. soil, he arrived in San Francisco at the height of the Flower Power era.

“I landed, and the Beatles were playing Sergeant Pepper,” he remembers. “I had just come from the worst place in the world to the grooviest place in the world!” Exposure to the San Francisco scene of the ’60s and ’70s developed Lanny’s love of music. After high school, he joined the Navy. Because that basketball coach in Ethiopia insisted his students learn how to type, Lanny was able to parlay his skill into a clerical assignment during Vietnam. Later, he spent a summer working on a shrimp boat in Kodiak, Alaska.

In the 1970s, Lanny’s father retired from his 23-year military career. Lanny decided to join his parents and put down roots in the Alamo City. Although his mother and father hailed from opposite ends of the country – dad from New Jersey, mom from California – they shared their Italian-American heritage. In fact, his grandmother used to babysit Joe DiMaggio when they were kids, Lanny said, adding he is DiMaggio’s fifth cousin. It didn’t matter where in the world the family ended up, his mother kept Lanny and his three younger brothers happy by cooking the Sicilian family recipes.

Once settled in San Antonio, Lanny’s mother drew from her culinary heritage and opened a coffee shop in the Tesoro Petroleum Building. Lanny was on her team from the beginning — cooking, working front of the house, and adding décor from his extensive collection of vintage movie posters and photographs. A year later, the family relocated the business to Converse. What started as a sandwich shop transitioned into Papa Dante Italian restaurant, which has been open for 40 years on FM 1976, close to Randolph Air Force Base. Although Lanny and his brother John’s family run the restaurant, their mother still kept the books until her death last year at age 89.

In November, Lanny moved to his first-floor apartment at Independence Hill Retirement Community. He was ready for a change from the stairs and maintenance of his previous home. Now he enjoys the beautiful view of the greenbelt from his back patio and the friendly staff. He appreciates the ease of retrieving packages as he continues to add to his collections of photographs, records and sports memorabilia.

Lanny is up and out to Papa Dante by 5 a.m., every morning to prep the meatballs, set up the sauces, and bake the bacon for the restaurant.

“There’s nothing like the smell of bacon in the morning,” he enthused.