

A publication of Palm Village Retirement Community

PALM VILLAGER

November 2025 | palmvillage.com



PALM VILLAGE
RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

SPECIAL FEATURES

Resident Spotlights – Teruko "Teri" Tsuji

Recognizing Employee - Karely Alcantar

What's Happening on Campus



703 W. Herbert Avenue
Reedley, CA 93654

Please call for more information
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Palm Village Chapel Services



Enjoy Chapel every Thursday night.

Service begins at 6:00 pm with Old-Fashioned Hymns
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A Letter from our President



PALM VILLAGE
RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

A Season of Gratitude and Connection

As autumn settles into our Valley, we welcome the cooler air and much-needed rain—a refreshing shift that invites cozy blankets, warm drinks, and time with friends and family. This seasonal change offers a moment of pause and reflection for both residents and staff.

As we approach the holidays, our hearts are full of gratitude for the many blessings we've experienced on campus. We've welcomed new residents whose presence has brought fresh energy, engaging conversations, and meaningful friendships. These connections are the soul of community living—enriching our days with laughter, companionship, and shared stories.

In May, our team celebrated National Nursing Home Week with themed dress-up days, festive food, and spirited games. I even took a turn in the dunk tank—much to the delight of our staff! Their enthusiasm and creativity made the week unforgettable.

Western Days brought out our boots and cowboy hats for a time-honored Chuckwagon breakfast, live music, and a full day of activities. It was a joyful celebration of tradition and togetherness for our staff and residents.

This month, we are honored to highlight Teruko “Teri” Tsuji, an independent living resident and our campus centenarian. Born in Reedley and later living in the countryside of Hiroshima, Japan Teri is believed to be the only woman to have witnessed two atomic bomb detonations. Her life is a powerful testament to resilience and history, and we are privileged to have her in our community.

We're also proud to spotlight Karely Alcantar, our Assisted and Independent Living Administrator at Palm Village. Her title only begins to capture the breadth of responsibility she carries and the care she brings to our community. Karely embodies the spirit of service—with a “can-do” mindset and, when needed, a “let's-give-it-a-try” determination. Her leadership is marked by thoughtful oversight, attention to detail, and a deep commitment to both residents and staff. Beyond her professional role, Karely's family is beautifully close-knit, and we know you'll enjoy getting to know her story more deeply.

As we gather with loved ones this holiday season, we wish you peace, health, and joy. May this time of year bring warmth to your home and gratitude to your heart.

Warm regards,

Jim Higbee
President & CEO

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good: his love endures.
Psalms 118:29

*Jim Higbee takes one for the team.
Palm Village Skilled Nursing Home Week - August 2025.*





by Laurie Diamant



The Sunamoto Farm in Japan

The Remarkable Life of Teruko “Teri” Tsuji



This year, I've had the privilege of sitting down with residents of Palm Village who have lived through some of the most extraordinary chapters in history. These individuals are more than storytellers—they are the keepers of time, holding within them memories of eras that shaped the world.

Palm Village resident Teruko “Teri” Tsuji, a radiant centenarian whose life bridges continents, generations, and seismic moments in history.

Born in Reedley, California in 1925, Teri now resides in a cozy Independent Living patio home. At 100 years old, she continues to live with grace and purpose, spending her days knitting blankets, sweaters, and hats for the World Mission project “Knit for Kids”—a quiet act of generosity that echoes the resilience and compassion woven throughout her life.

Teri’s story begins with her grandparents, Tomokichi Sunamoto and Naka Okayama, who came from Japan to the United States in 1891. Their first stop was Hawaii before taking another ship to Seattle, Washington to work on the railroads before making their way to Reedley, where they worked on the Walter Rice Ranch on Rio Vista Avenue. Tomokichi and Naka moved back to the countryside of Hiroshima in 1925, just before Teri was born.



The Sunamoto family in Reedley

First Row - Teri, Suzie, & Kenichi / Back Row - Kakuichi & Masano

When Teri's father Kakuichi was 21, his mother told him it was time for him to marry. He traveled to Japan, where he met Masano Sumihiro and his marriage was arranged for the following year. In 1922, he wed Masano and moved her to Reedley to begin their life together.



Teri's high school silk embroidery project



*Parents (top) -
Kakuichi and Masano Sunamoto
Grandparent (right) -
Tomokichi Sunamoto and Naka Okayama*



Teri was the middle child, growing up alongside her older sister Suzuye "Suzie" and younger brother Kenichi. But their childhood was to be marked by profound loss. In 1938, their mother Masano fell ill with pneumonia. Despite being hospitalized in Selma, California, she was denied treatment while the attending doctor was away at a conference. She passed away at just 32 years of age, leaving behind three children and a grieving husband.

Her father felt that he could not raise the children alone and made the difficult decision to send Suzie, Teri, and Kenichi to live with their grandparents in the countryside of Hiroshima. In March 1939, the family traveled to Japan. The children were quickly enrolled

in school. Teri and Suzie attended an all-girls high school. It was a hard transition for Teri since she did not read enough kanji to follow the lessons. She studied hard each day to become proficient and by the second semester was passing her classes with high marks. Teri excelled in embroideries which were required in home economic classes and her final project took a semester to complete. The embroideries with intricate silk stitching and such fine detail. They are beautifully displayed in her home.

On his voyage home from Japan, Kakuichi met Mary Hondo from Rupert, Idaho. They married a year later. Their father returned to his fruit-hauling business in Parlier, delivering fruit to the Los Angeles markets. In August 1942, Kakuichi and his wife and son were forcibly relocated to the Gila River Internment Camp in Arizona under the War Relocation Authority. Less than a year later, they were released and resettled in Rupert, Idaho and then back to Parlier, California. Kakuichi and Mary had a total of six children, half-siblings of Teri.

When Teri was a junior in high school her class was sent to work in a factory where they sewed military insignias on uniforms. Her junior and senior years of high school were mostly spent doing war work. Her brother Kenichi and other schoolboys were sent away for almost two years to work in a factory camp that supported the war effort. Living in Japan, but having been born an American made the war years especially difficult for Teri.

On the farm in Japan, Teri helped her grandparents with farming chores. They grew all of the food that they had to eat. Grandmother made shoyu and tofu, and they relied on the rice that they grew as well as okazu, a side-dish made with potatoes, onions, and daikon grown on the farm. There was little fish to purchase and because of the scarcity of food in the city, when family would come from Hiroshima asking for rice, the grandparents would give rice to them which meant less for the household.

Teri graduated high school and was given a choice to complete two more years of schooling or go to work, so she chose to work at a bank outside Hiroshima. One of her friends worked there as well, and they learned how to use the abacus to do calculations.

Her life was upended again on August 6, 1945, when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. The family heard the air raid sirens, and they felt the bomb blast even though they lived in the countryside. They watched the mushroom cloud of black smoke rise—a haunting image etched into memory. Her sister Suzie, her infant son Shigeki, and her sister's mother-in-law were on a trolley trying to reach the family farm when the blast hit. Though they survived, their kimonos were embedded by flying glass.

Due to the war, they had not heard from their father for five years. Determined to reunite his family, her father sent funds for Teri and Kenichi to return to the U.S. After eight years abroad, Teri came back to Parlier, reconnecting with old friends and forging a new path. She enrolled in a sewing school in Fresno, where she quickly distinguished herself with her skill and artistry. She later worked for a friend who had returned from Los Angeles to open a custom sewing shop in downtown Fresno.

In 1953, at a social club for young Japanese Americans, Teri met Hisao “Bill” Tsuji. They were soon married at the Buddhist Temple in Parlier, California, and celebrated their union with a honeymoon trip to the Grand Canyon. On their return journey, they made

a detour through the Nevada Test Site, where Teri witnessed her second atomic bomb explosion! On May 25, 1953, at Area 5 on Frenchman Flat, Bill and Teri observed the Upshot-Knothole Grable test—an atmospheric detonation of a W9 nuclear artillery shell. Bill was exhilarated by the spectacle, but for Teri, the experience stirred deep fear and sorrow. She had already lived through the devastating aftermath of Hiroshima, and the sight of another mushroom cloud—this time

on American soil—was haunting. It's likely that Teri is the only woman in history to have witnessed two atomic bomb blasts: one in Japan, and one in the United States as a newlywed. And she may well be the only living person able to tell such a story.

Her husband Bill was a hardworking farmer and together they built a life rooted in community and agriculture, raising three sons—Lyle, Gordon, and Gary—while growing grapes for raisins, peaches, nectarines, and plums on their farm. Teri worked alongside Bill on the farm and worked as a teacher's aide in Parlier in elementary school for eight years. When Bill retired from farming, leasing and selling the farmland around their home, he went to work until his final retirement at Kearney Agricultural Research Station.

Her husband passed away in November 2013 and Teri remained in their home for three years before moving to Palm Village. The transition brought her peace and companionship. She enjoyed the sewing circle for a few years when the Dress-a-Girl mission project was in full swing, making beautiful dresses for young girls around the world. She cherishes the care she receives and the sense of community among neighbors who look out for one another.



In April of this year, Teri's 100th birthday was celebrated with joy and reverence. Her children, their spouses, six grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and extended family gathered at Palm Village—just across the Kings River from the ranch where she was born.

Teri's life is a tapestry of migration, resilience, and quiet heroism. Her story reminds us that history isn't just found in textbooks—it lives in the hearts of those who have endured, adapted, and given back. She is not only a witness to history but a contributor to its unfolding.





A Life Led with Quiet Strength and Unshakable Purpose

Karely Alcantar serves as the Assisted and Independent Living Administrator for Palm Village — a title that only begins to hint at the depth of her daily impact. With quiet confidence and an unwavering sense of purpose, Karely embodies what it means to have an indomitable spirit: a kind of inner fire that refuses to be extinguished, no matter the odds, setbacks, or demands of the day.

Her strength is not worn like a badge — it's stitched into the rhythm of her days. It shows up in the way she navigates complex regulations, supports families through transitions, and leads with empathy in her interactions. It's the kind of strength that's forged over time, shaped by experience, and sustained by love.

Karely has dedicated over 13 years to senior care, beginning as a Certified Nursing Assistant and later earning her LVN license. Today, she oversees admissions for both Independent and Assisted Living at Palm Village, manages evolving care regulations, supervises staff. Her leadership is grounded in a two-pronged philosophy: Quality of Life and Safety. These guiding principles help set clear expectations for residents and families, ensuring that care is not only consistent—but deeply respectful of everyone's dignity.

Jim Higbee, President and CEO of Palm Village, shares: "Working with Karely is a true privilege. Her kindness and compassion shine through in every interaction—with residents, families, and staff alike."

One year old Karely



Driven by purpose and guided by vision, Karely defines success not as a destination, but as a daily reflection of the care and integrity she brings to those around her. At the heart of her work is communication. Karely believes that listening—truly listening—to residents and their families is one of the most vital aspects of her role. It's how trust is built, needs are met, and lives are honored.



Born in Visalia and raised in the small towns of Oroshi, Sultana, and Orange Cove, Karely's work ethic was shaped early. As a child, she spent weekends and summers helping her parents in the fields. By age 14, she had secured a school work permit and began working in packing houses—balancing labor with learning until she graduated high school.

She met Jose, her future husband during her time at Orange Cove High School. He proposed just two weeks after graduation, and together they've built a life centered on love, family, and shared values.

Karely and Jose are the proud parents of five children: Jordan (12), Alexander (6), Kaylee (6), Benjamin (4), and Matthew (3). In 2021, they adopted three of their children who are birth siblings, expanding their family with open hearts and open arms. Their home is a place of structure, warmth, and unwavering care—supported by an extended family that shares in the joy and responsibility of raising the next generation.

Despite the demands of work and parenting, Karely and Jose prioritize time with their children. Weekends are often spent outside, and they enjoy hiking through Sequoia and Kings Canyon, or exploring the serenity of Hume Lake. These moments of connections surrounded by nature and laughter—are a testament to the life they've built together. A busy life indeed.

Karely's journey—from the fields of the Central Valley to the halls of Palm Village—is a powerful reminder that strength isn't always loud. Sometimes, it's steady. Sometimes, it's soft. And sometimes, it's simply indomitable.



Residents & Staff

What's Happening



**WESTERN
DAYS**



**TOTE
Painting**



ASSISTED LIVING MEET & GREET





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5 Levels of Living



PALM VILLAGE
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- Independent Living • Assisted Living
 - Assisted Living Memory Care
- Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation
 - Skilled Nursing Memory Care

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