

# 'Grandpa' volunteers as cross-country coach

Community Education Senior Living

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*Cross country and track volunteer coach Manuel Quintana works with head coach Heather Abel at Maricopa High School. Photo by Victor Moreno*

**By Joycelyn Cabrera**

At 68 years old, volunteer cross-country coach Manuel Quintana has an unusual nickname around the Maricopa High School campus.

The students refer to him as “Grandpa” or “Coach Grandpa.” Quintana said the students have called him Grandpa for many years, ever since he began coaching his granddaughter, who called him “Tata,” a Spanish term of endearment for grandfathers. Once he told students, “Tata means Grandpa,” the nickname spread.

Quintana has volunteered as a coach at MHS for more than a decade. Originally from Mesa, Quintana graduated from Westwood High School and attended Mesa Community College before transferring to ASU. Quintana left the university to pursue a mechanics apprenticeship and stayed in the field 25 years. Quintana moved to Maricopa in 1978 and worked as a mechanic before beginning a new “career” as a volunteer coach.

Quintana began working with the MHS cross-country team after he realized he enjoyed coaching his granddaughter, a former student. He became involved with the Rams’ sports program simply because he liked working with the students and watching them improve. Quintana has helped student-athletes progress from running a half-mile to nearly three miles mid-season.

For five years, Quintana has worked with head coach Heather Abel, who doubles as an MHS teacher. Abel regards him as someone who “has been a real positive influence with the kids.”

“He really knows his stuff. He loves it. Everybody knows who he is,” she said.

The student-athletes themselves adore their coach, feeling positive about their progress individually and as a team.

“We work hard,” senior Megan Carr said. “It’s definitely a mental sport; it’s difficult, but it’s worth it.”

Quintana hopes his teaching and coaching will result in constant improvement for the students, passing on the knowledge of previous coaches like Duane Anderson and Ronnie Buchanan.

And being called Grandpa? Quintana feels good about the nickname: “It shows they have a lot of respect.”

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