

JOYFUL KEYS LIVING: DENISE DOWNING BELIEVES IN THE POSSIBILITIES OF LIFE

By [Emily Steele](#)

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Through her expressions, words and actions, it is easy to tell that Denise Downing believes life is grand, full of hope and possibility — and even a little magic. She embraces life and lives in the present.

A longtime resident of Islamorada, Downing lives in a two-pod home that is nestled in the tree tops. The pods are connected by a walkway that is the perfect spot for viewing a leafy framed slice of the night sky.

Each pod has its distinctive flair, with one being her living space and the other comfortable guest quarters that are currently being occupied by her mother, Marilyn, 95. Downing's living space reflects her passion for several things; the Florida Keys, France, family, friends and the JOY Center. It is the perfect place for gatherings.

Gathering people together is Downing's forte. She is one of those people who persistently and accurately bring people together to form friendships, marriages, businesses and community alliances.

As a champion at forming meaningful and lasting connections, she works tirelessly to do so for the JOY Center. When you see her in the grocery store, post office, library or at the local barber shop getting a haircut she will most likely be wearing her JOY T-shirt and name badge. If asked, she will explain what the JOY Center is and how important it is to the community. As a Just Older Youth Inc. board member, she also interacts with government figures in the community requesting they find funds within their budget to create and maintain a permanent, five-day-a-week location for a community center.

On Dec. 14, JOY Center held a Holiday Mingle & Jingle at St. James Episcopal Church Sanctuary in Islamorada. Attendees listened to some storytelling by Henry Rosenthal while enjoying holiday music by Ukulele Joy. It was the perfect opportunity to meet JOY's No. 1 cheerleader and champion, Denise Downing, and to make connections with others that may last a lifetime.

The JOY Center offers vibrant programs and lifelong learning experiences for people over 50 every Wednesday, both virtual and on-site. This monthly column will feature people within the community who utilize services and members of JOY. Visit justolderyouthinc.org for more information.