

ISLAMORADA SUPPORTS PERMANENT HOME FOR JOY SENIOR CENTER

By **Jim McCarthy** - October 20, 2021



JOY supporters: Attendees in support of the JOY Center hold signs of appreciation during the Islamorada Council meeting on Sept. 30 inside the Founders Park Community Center. JIM MCCARTHY/Keys Weekly

An organization that's mobilizing the older generation in the Upper Keys through various services and activities is seeking a permanent home. JOY, or Just for Older Youth, Center is hoping Monroe County officials grant them space at the old Plantation Key Courthouse, and the center has support from Islamorada in that endeavor.

Before village council members delved into an agenda on Sept. 30, Mayor Buddy Pinder took to the microphone to proclaim September as National Senior Center Month. Joining him was Betsy Baste, president of JOY, and Denise Downing to accept the proclamation.

JOY started in 2017 with a group of local residents seeing the need for an intergenerational center to serve Key Largo, Tavernier and Islamorada. With the old senior center torn down to make way for the new courthouse and jail facility, JOY is now asking county officials to grant it space at the old building to create a place where all people can grow, learn and make new connections.

As part of the proclamation, Pinder said the village is calling on the board of county commissioners to recognize the special contribution of JOY Center and consider

providing space at the old Plantation Key Courthouse or an appropriate venue for JOY.

“Whatever we can do to help, because we’re all going to be there one day,” Pinder said.

During a Sept. 15 meeting, Assistant County Administrator Kevin Wilson told county commissioners that several groups are seeking space at the old courthouse building on Plantation Key. With a new Monroe County Government Center under construction, the courts, sheriff’s office, clerk’s office, state attorney’s office and public works will be moving to the space. That leaves space at the old building available.

Along with JOY, juvenile justice and NOAA have expressed interest in space at the old facility. Wilson said he doesn’t expect offices currently occupied by judges and other officials to be vacant until later this year or 2022.

JOY provides everything from technology classes and social gatherings to games and wellness. During the pandemic, the JOY Center ensured vulnerable citizens ages 65 and older weren’t feeling pandemic-related loneliness and isolation.

Baste said the JOY Center has almost 600 members who receive services. She thanked the village and Pinder for recognizing what the Upper Keys community has with its older population.

“We are really working hard and tirelessly to incorporate this as a place for everyone here,” she said.

More information is at justolderyouthinc.org.



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JIM MCCARTHY

Jim McCarthy is one of the many who escaped the snow and frigid temperatures in Western New York. A former crime & court reporter and city editor for two Western New York newspapers, Jim has been honing his craft since he graduated from St. Bonaventure University in 2014. In his 5-plus years in the Keys, Jim has enjoyed connecting with the community. Jim is past president of the Key Largo Sunset Rotary Club. When he's not working, he's busy chasing his son, Lucas, around the house and enjoying time with family.



