

JOYFUL KEYS LIVING: 58 YEARS OF ADVENTURE & LOVE FOR TAVERNIER'S HANK & BOBBI FREELAND

By **Contributed** - February 14, 2022



Hank and Bobbi Freeland. CONTRIBUTED

Editor's note: Just Older Youth Inc., a nonprofit, founded the JOY Center in 2018. The JOY Center offers vibrant programs and lifelong learning experiences for people over 50 every Wednesday, both virtual and on site. This bi-weekly column features the many dedicated people who are working to achieve this goal.

By Emily Steele

Bobbi and Hank Freeland met on a blind date, the first (and last) for either of them. Nine months later they were married and began a 58-year adventure of traveling around the world, raising children, scuba diving and hot tubing.

They credit their hot tub for providing the foundation for their happy marriage. Well, not their hot tub exactly, but the many open, trusting conversations they had



together. Both agreed that communication is the key to building a lasting relationship.

As Bobbi stated, "We didn't keep secrets. If something was bothering one of us, we put it on the table and worked through it."

Hank is a retired TWA pilot who flew internationally, and Bobbi sometimes flew along. Frequently, they would expand those trips into scuba diving adventures and have visited many reefs around the world. In 1985 they came to the Florida Keys on vacation. After diving the reefs here, they looked at each other (probably in a hot tub) and asked themselves, "Why would we dive anywhere else?"

For the following 37 years, that is exactly what they did; first as part-time residents and then as full-time once their children left home to build lives of their own. They bought a bayfront property and, over the years, created a home for themselves, their boats, kayaks, fire pit and hot tub.

Hank is an outdoor person who enjoys planning and completing projects; their home reflects this passion. Bobbi loves fishing and is involved with Wild Women on the Water, a women's fishing club. She is also involved with the JOY Center, an organization that provides activities such as yoga, ukulele classes, writing workshops, computer help sessions and guest speakers. Bobbi goes to play mahjongg. Through mahjongg, she has experienced the sense of community JOY center provides when the participants come together; either at the various temporary sites they have inhabited and, more recently, virtually.

Bobbi is adamant about the JOY Center and its possibility of expanding into a larger, permanent Upper Keys community center. Hank and she are staunch supporters of the work the JOY Center board members and others are doing to make that possibility a reality. They express two driving forces behind their support. The first is the reality that several of their friends have lost spouses over the past few years and are in the midst of reinventing their lives as older, single adults. Many do not have a place that provides emotional and social support for this change. As "older youth," they could benefit from a community center that is in a permanent location and available to the public daily. The second is based on an 11,000-mile backroads trip she and Hank took last year.



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During their trip they sought out small towns to visit. Almost every one had a community center. All of those they visited were thriving with programs to benefit the multi-generational nature of the community. They both would like to see the Upper



Keys have a community center that serves the needs of the teenage through senior citizen population.

Bobbi and Hank have two sons, one in Colorado and another in northern Florida. As I left, they invited me to come back later that evening to join in an AA (appetizers and drinks) party they were hosting in celebration of their oldest son's recent cancer diagnosis and treatment plan that included a result of full recovery.

It struck me as I was driving home how indicative their invitation was of the people who live in the Keys. I had just met Bobbi and Hank; they didn't really know anything about me, only the sense of community we had built at their kitchen table. In that discussion Bobbi and Hank defined JOY as living. And I thought, that is what they are striving for, an Upper Keys community center that provides a permanent, daily opportunity to build community and well-being.

For more information about JOY, visit justolderyouthinc.org.



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