

UPPER KEYS SENIOR CENTER RECEIVES GRANT TO EMPOWER SENIORS TO USE TECHNOLOGY

By Charlotte Twine - November 9, 2021



Educator Betsy Baste has been teaching students of all ages about technology for years, including at the Plantation Key senior center, seen here pre-pandemic. CONTRIBUTED

Jackie Jack, a longtime attendee of the JOY Center's programs for seniors, remembers going to teacher Betsy Baste's technology classes every Thursday morning with a list of the questions that baffled her about her iPhone and iPad.

"She's a saint," Jack raved about Baste's teaching abilities. Jack now feels so empowered with technology that she regularly pays her bills and she renewed her boyfriend's driver's license online, and she also schooled her children on downloading the new security measure from Apple.

"I told my daughters, 'You better update your devices.' And they go, 'Wow, Mom,'" Jack said with a laugh.

And this is Baste's master plan: to empower seniors to use technology without fear. Now she has even more support to do so, through her work with the JOY Center. JOY stands for "Just Older Youth," a program that was started in 2017 to serve the senior communities of Key Largo, Tavernier and Islamorada. JOY's goal is to create a facility to provide a flexible space for classes. Through JOY, Baste applied for and won a grant for \$8,000 from the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys.



The funding covers the cost of equipment for people to use to learn about technology and to create programs for students to attend.

"The goal is twofold: to share tech knowledge so people get more comfortable and to expand the reach of JOY so people know and utilize it," said Baste, who is the president of JOY in addition to being its tech teacher.

Her tech and education background is extensive: She has both a bachelor's and a master's in education, and her last job before volunteering for JOY was teaching technology to inner city kids through Job Corps in North Carolina.

"Many had never had fingers on a keyboard, even though this was 2010 and they were 16 to 24 years old," she said, comparing their dilemma to that of a senior who is scared to touch a computer. "I always stress that tech is a tool we use. It's not meant to be something that uses us. It's like a knife in a kitchen drawer. It's useful, but I can hurt myself. Tech is no different. We shouldn't be afraid."

Baste said that typical questions her students may have are, "How do I not get hacked on social media?" or "How do I share photos with my family?"

The class funded by the grant is called "Tech Savvy Seniors on the Go," and it's spread over three sessions. Though Baste is available to bring the class to other interested facilities or groups, the next class will be held at Key Largo library on Tuesday, Nov. 2, 9 and 16 from 3:30 to 5 p.m.



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Jack emphasizes that JOY has many other fun classes, such as stretching, line dancing and ukulele, all free.

"It's amazing not more people know JOY exists," she said. "I love it and I'm a big supporter."

More information about Tech Savvy Seniors on the Go or the JOY Center is available from Baste at 305-850-8449 or via email to justolderyouthinc@gmail.com. Inquiries will be answered within a day.



Baste continued her technology classes on Zoom during the pandemic. *CONTRIBUTED*



Through a grant, Betsy Baste is now taking her tech classes for seniors to different facilities in the Upper Keys, such as Key Largo library, seen here. *CONTRIBUTED*



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Charlotte Twine fled her New York City corporate publishing life and happily moved to the Keys six years ago. She has written for Travel + Leisure, Allure, and Offshore magazines; Elle.com; and the Florida Keys Free Press. She loves her two elderly Pomeranians, writing stories that uplift and inspire, making children laugh, the color pink, tattoos, Johnny Cash, and her husband. Though not necessarily in that order.