

John and Marianne Smith Edge

Living an Active Lifestyle

By Dave Taylor

John and Marianne Smith Edge are seniors, but only on paper.

"Forever young is fine," Marianne joked as the couple sat in the sun room of their Ford Avenue home in Owensboro earlier this month.

Her husband John has acquired the wisdom of someone who's lived a long life, and who's been married for 37 years. "I just turned 65 and Marianne is a little younger," he said, offering a diplomatic answer to a dangerous question.

John is a retired banker, having retired in 2015 as regional president of First Security Bank, which later was sold to German American Bank.

Marianne is still working, running her own consulting business, The AgriNutrition Edge, where she works with food and ag related companies on strategy, communications and consumer insights, and produces a blog on the same topics at www.agrinutritionedge.com.

Both of them stay very active.

"I started at 5:30 this morning," said Marianne, who said she typically wakes up early to exercise at nearby Pure Barre.

"It's kind of a cross between ballet, aerobics and... it's a lot of weight resistance stuff," John said. "It's pretty heavy duty. Probably averages three days a week, four probably and it's her and a bunch of 20-somethings. A few 30-somethings."

"And there's 40 and there's folks my age," she said. "It's great motivation when sometimes the majority are younger."

John walks as often as he can but both are avid skiers, to the point that they even went in halves with John's sister and her husband on a cabin in Colorado where they can hit the slopes daily in the winter and hike during the summer. "This year we spent all of July there and then about 10 days in August," he said. "And then we'll spend about half of ski season there."

On their hikes they've climbed 13 different 14,000-foot peaks in Colorado. "There's 54 14ers in Colorado so my goal was to try to make it to half of them, because we kind of started late," Marianne said. "We'll hopefully maybe get to 20 anyway."

On the most recent one, Mt. Massive, they camped at the base and started out early for the long haul. "We started at 4:30 in the morning... it took us what, 10 hours?" she said. "More like 11," said John. Despite their active lifestyles, both of them got into sports later in life, although John did play sports in high school. "We didn't really start doing like spin classes in the mornings and really working out until probably mid-40s," he said.

Marianne grew up on a dairy farm and didn't have time for sports when she was younger, but she and John made time for them after they got married. "As one of my friends said we became adult onset jocks," she said. "I was always active but actually probably ran my first half marathon when I was 47."

They stay active in the community too, with John volunteering with Habitat for Humanity and serving



as the chair of trustees at Settle Memorial Methodist Church, and Marianne helping launch the Owensboro chapter of Impact 100, a women's charity.

"A good way to describe it it's a women's giving circle," she said. "The concept originally was \$1,000, if 100 women gave, to see what an impact we could have. And first year we had like 150 and thereafter we've had over 200 every year." They pool the money and give \$100,000 "transformational" grants to nonprofits to enable them to make big improvements.

The couple have remained mostly healthy, save for a current back injury for John and a prostate cancer battle in 2011, and they attribute it to eating healthy, which is made easier by Marianne, a registered dietitian who has even served as the president of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

"Eighty percent of all chronic diseases, i.e. diabetes, heart issues, hypertension, a lot of times are associated with lifestyle changes that you could correct," she said. "I think the key is it is about balance. If any diet tells you to eliminate a particular group, it might work, but there is a reason why we talk about dairy, lean proteins, fruits and vegetables and fiber," said Marianne.

She urges everyone, seniors included, to follow the tried and true advice of eating from every food group, instead of eliminating things like dairy and meat because they contain nutrients growing or aging bodies need.

"In the scheme of things variety in moderation may sound boring but it still really is the core of good guidance in that regard," she said.

Just as important as good eating habits is getting in the habit of moving around, even if it's just choosing to walk to a nearby destination instead of hopping in the car.

"We walk downtown to dinner occasionally from here," John said. "That's about a mile and a half." Walking in this area is uncommon enough that passersby might not understand.

"I've had people even stop to try to pick me up," said Marianne. "Because if you're not dressed as if you're working out... and I'm trucking down the street they think something's happened to my car or something."

Besides getting out in the neighborhood, the couple travels a lot, which they say helps keep them young. They hiked through Spain a couple of years ago and the southern part of France last November, and they're going back to Tuscany in April.

"I enjoy meeting the people there," he said. "That's really the thing with me. I come back from a trip and oh, so we saw Eiffel Tower or Pisa, or whatever there... What I remember is my interactions with the different individuals and how that just gives you a better feeling for people wherever you visit. We're all the same."

Travel has even deeper meaning for Marianne.

"My dad's passed, but he never traveled, but he always wanted to know what's going on," she said. "So I always still do look for agriculture things because I say it's through my father's eyes."

Travel is expensive, but the couple says it doesn't have to be out of the country to be beneficial.

"I think at any age it's important," she said, "just the engagement of other individuals, whether it's traveling down the street or across the river, being able to interact with folks maybe outside your total comfort zone."

If staying young requires curiosity or goal setting, the couple might live forever.

"I've got a Brescia student ID now," said John. "I'm taking a class at Brescia. I'm doing a pottery class. Most colleges after 65 allow you to audit classes for free."

He's thinking of taking another class on business ethics next year, and he has a list of music festivals he plans to attend with his old college friends.

Marianne is going to Japan on September 30 with a Leadership Kentucky group, but she better not stay gone long because the slopes are calling their name.

"I plan to be on skis by the first of December because I bought new skis last year," she said. "And I've got at least two 14ers that I have to climb next summer."

While not everyone can travel internationally, vacation in their own cabin or have a dietitian cooking their meals, the couple says that staying healthy is a mindset and staying active is something to practice before it's too late.

"I'm blessed that I've been physically active and know that things can happen that can change that sometimes, so take advantage of it," she said. "Appreciate the time you have."

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