

New PELICAN

Happy Fourth!

**IF IT CAN
BE DONE
SITTING
DOWN, SHE
CAN DO IT**
JOHN KNOX WOMAN
DOESN'T LET HER
WHEELCHAIR STOP
HER - PAGE 18

WHAT'S INSIDE

- AUTO THEFTS ON THE RISE IN LBTS - 2
- COMMISSION QUESTIONS \$4 MILLION FUND - 4
- DEERFIELD BEACH OBJECTS TO POLICE BUDGET INCREASE - 6
- "WASTEFUL BEACH NOURISHMENTS" - 8
- DETECTIVE EARNS PBA RECOGNITION - 16

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FOURTH FUN!

Pompano, Deerfield, Fort Lauderdale, and LBTS will all have big events to celebrate July 4th! Page 14 and 15!



QUICK FIND

- TIDES REPORT - 11
- CROSSWORD - 13
- CLASSIFIEDS - 22
- SUDOKU - 22
- BUSINESS DIRECTORY - 25 & 27



“If I can do it sitting down - I did it”: This John Knox woman never lets her disability stop her

By Martin Lenkowsky
New Pelican Writer

Pompano Beach - Although John Knox Village resident Terry “Scooter” Hayes is confined to a wheelchair due to a neurological disorder, she remains more active than many people.

Hayes, 66, suffers from primary cerebellar degeneration, which has resulted in complete paralysis in her legs. However, her slight, small-framed body seated on a wheelchair belies what she’s been able to accomplish despite her physical limitations. At age 63, she competed on the U.S. Wheelchair Fencing team at the 2020 Paralympics Games in Tokyo.

She was the oldest member of the team, having to compete against



Terry “Scooter” Hayes was a member of the U.S. Wheelchair Fencing Team. [Courtesy]

others as young as their teens.

Having been athletic since she was a child, she refused to spend the rest of her life just sitting in a wheelchair as her condition gradually progressed.

When confronted with that reality, she told her doctors, “I’m not gonna live like that. I’m gonna live.” Hayes is a U.S. Army veteran having served as a heavy-equipment operator for the military from 1977 to 1979. She was no stranger to Army life herself when she joined. Her dad was in the service and her family traveled around a lot when she was growing up. Following her military service, she became a special education teacher.

Surprisingly, Hayes never fenced until 2017 when she was 58 years old. She knew nothing about the sport until she watched a video on

wheelchair fencing, also known as “parafencing.” When she decided to pursue the sport, which requires powerful upper extremity strength and agility, the Veterans Administration provided her with a special fencing wheelchair, a fixed wheelchair, which allows for more arm and shoulder mobility, necessary for the sport.

“It (fencing) never occurred to me,” she said. “It wasn’t on my radar.”

Even before she decided to pursue fencing, she realized how much she missed engaging in sports. Through Facebook, she learned about a sports camp in Colorado exclusively for women in wheelchairs. So she signed up. At the camp, they did 20 different sports including horseback riding and

SEE I DID IT ON 20

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I DID IT FROM 18

sailing, but not fencing. The camp owner's saying was, "We've gotten people off the couch and active."

After her curiosity in wheelchair fencing was piqued, Hayes found herself a local fencing coach who not only taught her the sport and its intricate moves, but remained her coach throughout her Olympics fencing career. That coach had never worked with someone in a wheelchair before, Hayes said.

As for what fencing has added to her life, "It allowed me to realize I can still be an athlete. I've been able to travel around the world. I was able to compete in the 2020 Summer Games (which were delayed until 2021 because of COVID). That's the biggest stage in the world."

She actually retired from fencing about eight months after the Games. "Wheelchair fencing is extremely difficult on the shoulders."

Hayes and her wife, Freda Routt,

73, moved to John Knox Village in November 2024. Prior to that, they lived at the Carefree Resort in North Fort Myers. And although her fencing days are now behind her, Hayes is not the slightest iota less active. "Whatever sport came up, I can do," she said. "If I can do it sitting down – I did it." These have included waterskiing as well as skydiving. It fits in with her own motto: "Live-Life-Large." She maintains an active lifestyle at John Knox Village as well. "I go to the gym. I go to every dance and party they have."

Looking back at her Paralympic fencing days, she said, "When I was competing, I never looked at age. You get in there and do your best."

She says good sportsmanship – something she feels might be lacking today – was always important to her. She always had a friendly smile for an opponent at the start of every match. "Then I pulled that mask down and I was like a gorilla in there. Bring it on, girl."



[Above] Hayes and her wife, Freda Routt, at the 2021 North American Championships in Salt Lake City. [Front page photo] Hayes fences in the Zonal Championships in Saskatoon, Canada, 2018. [Courtesy]

REGISTRY FROM 19

special assistance in the event of a hurricane or other emergency, Broward County offers a Vulnerable Population Registry, a tool that municipalities can use to help evaluate residents' needs in their communities and assist in planning a response in an emergency.

Residents at risk due to a disability, frailty or health issues, regardless of age, and who elect to stay home in the event of a hurricane or other emergency should pre-register in the Vulnerable Population Registry. Registration should be in advance before a storm threatens. This registry is used by cities for planning purposes only, and is not a guarantee of assistance.

Visit webapps2.broward.org/vulnerableregistry/welcome.aspx or call 954-831-3902, TTY 954-831-3940 to register.

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