

Starting a Business After Retirement

BY ERICA MANFRED

When 83-year-old Barbara Fox contemplated retirement, she didn't envision moving to a Senior Living Community and enjoying carefree days of canasta or pickleball. She just wanted to escape the demands of managing her large Miami home as a single divorcee. So she moved to The Palace Suites Senior Living Community, where meals and housekeeping are taken care of. In 2014, after retiring from a 20-year stint with a timeshare exchange company, she started her own business, Help Is on the Way. "Since I was 11 years old I've worked," she explains. "I couldn't imagine not working."

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

What's your background?

I was born in NY and raised in Chicago, and I went to Northern Illinois University.

I came to Miami in '67 as a training instructor for Eastern Airlines in Chicago. I was the last one out the door when they closed. I went to work for another travel organization managing timeshares for 20 years and retired at 75. That's when I started my own business.

I'm divorced, and my family is all but gone. I have no one close, no children. I owned a home in Miami where I lived with my mom until she died at 101. Then I moved to The Palace Suites where I have a beautiful apartment on the top floor, right next to my best friend.

What kinds of services do you offer?

I help out people who can't manage on their own. I walk dogs for older people who have mobility issues. I house-sit, which makes people feel more secure when traveling. Even with a camera, houses get broken into in Miami. And I make sure I do whatever you would do if you were home: picking up mail, watering plants, taking out garbage, changing cat litter, keeping pets company. A lot of pet owners like having pet sitters at their home when they're away because their pets feel more secure. I typically pet-sit 10 to 12 nights a month.

How can you afford Senior Living? It doesn't sound cheap.

I can afford it because I always carried my lunch. And I sold my big home in Miami at the right time.

What's the best thing about Senior Living?

They do it all for you. It's a pleasure not to have to worry about my house when I'm away. I'll leave a note on the bed that the linens don't need changing.



Resident Barbara Fox walks a dog outside The Palace Suites main entrance.

Then when I return and open the door, the apartment is spotless and smells simply lovely. I hated housekeeping and cooking, and now it's done for me. I love being taken care of. I feel like I'm on a cruise, but I don't have to worry about packing or getting seasick.

Do you find it easy to make friends there?

I'm a happy person, and I have lots of friends. I love that it's a community. I've met a lot of people here who I call friends, people I eat with, dance with, play Rummikub with, make jewelry with. We do trivia at lunch. There's always something to do.

Do you help out people at your community as well?

Absolutely. I have a lot of clients here. I'm always available to people here who need an errand or anything else done. I make sure the dogs I walk get a workout. They need the exercise because a lot of dog owners who live here use walkers and walk their dogs very slowly.

Do you ever have problems controlling a dog? You're not a big woman.

Neither are the dogs' owners for the most part. This is a senior residence after all, and no one has a Great Dane. But I have a way with dogs. It's called bribery. If a dog gets out of line, I bribe them with treats to behave. That works.

What's your secret to making friends?

I'm not shy. I go up to people and introduce myself. Especially when someone is new, I give them a smile and a hi. Sometimes staff makes sure gregarious people have dinner with newcomers. When I moved in here, my friend introduced me to everyone, and I pay it forward.

What's your advice for people who wind up alone in old age?

This is a big issue, as more of us are aging alone. The majority of people here are widowed. They may have recently lost a spouse; kids may or may not live close by.

My advice for people who are lonely and rattling around in the family home is to bite the bullet, get rid of that big house and all your stuff, and start life again. Move to a community, whether it's independent living or another community. People come into this facility very lonely, but they make friends and start a new life.

I'm a big proponent of community living.

Would you consider marrying again?

You never know, but I doubt it. I told my last husband he gave me the best 10 years of my life. Unfortunately, we were married for 32 years. He was fun for a while. We traveled the world. We did diving out of the Keys and Caribbean trips, and we dove the Great Barrier Reef.

How old do you feel?

Depends on the time of day. First thing in the morning, 83; by the middle of the day, 65 or 70; on the dance floor, even younger. I start the day slow and work up from there. That's the key to aging.

What's your worst fear?

Dementia, since I have no one to take care of me.

What's your biggest regret?

I married the wrong guys a couple of times. Not getting a college degree. Not learning to ski. But I really have no regrets.