

Then & Now

SHE DOES AS SHE LOVES.

"I won't be at the club playing cards. Not that there's anything wrong with that." This, from Joan Thomson when asked what she does in her "down time." It appears none of this woman's time is truly down.

This may be her secret.

Joan Thomson is the matriarch and still one heartbeat of the pulse behind Waterfront Properties. She's aware that some consider it unique that, at age 83, she still awakes excited at the prospect of coming to work. What some consider unique, she regards simply as living the life she's almost always known.

Over the last 30 years, Waterfront Properties has grown to be the northern Palm Beaches and Treasure Coast's dominant luxury real estate company, single-handedly accounting for more waterfront real estate transactions than any other brokerage in the local area. In more than 20 southeastern Florida towns between Boca Raton, Delray Beach, Palm Beach, North Palm Beach, Jupiter and Stuart, Waterfront Properties offers waterfront and club community properties from \$250,000 to more than \$50 million. Not bad for a business that got its start in a one-room office and, if Joan's son Rob Thomson remembers correctly, hit its stride in the front seat of her car.

"My mom is awesome," Rob says. "She's an incredible partner and continues to be a mentor. She'll never admit it, but she's a true visionary. She's tough. She's encouraging. Few people possess her humility and genuineness."

Joan obtained her real estate license at age 37. That was in 1969, and she's never looked back. She's also never looked too far ahead. From then until now, she's just done the work. She landed her first job with a Fort Lauderdale brokerage. "It was a great education," she remembers. "My boss shared his trade secrets."

Joan worked in a one room branch office of the Ft. Lauderdale firm on Tequesta Drive, traveling the state doing syndications. When asked if, as a woman, she was a pioneer during those early days, Joan replied, "No. I never really felt that. I only had one encounter with a man who flat refused to work with a woman." She continued, "Real estate has always been a great place for women to forge

a career. You have to be smart. You have to be driven to succeed. But, you don't have to have a formal education, though I did."

She added that women possess attributes that adapt extremely well to the real estate profession and can find a lot of satisfaction in it. "I never had any ambition to become what we are today. I was happy doing my business on Jupiter Island. I made quite a nice living."

From 1974 to 2009 Jupiter Island was as she recalls, her "baby."

"In the mid-80's it was just Rob and me in the first unit in our present location. We had a secretary doing some brochures. Rob did the Loxahatchee River. I was doing my Jupiter Island thing. We brought in a guy to do waterfront condos. And, so it went."

In 1987, after noticing that around 80% of her closings from the previous two years were waterfront homes or lots, Joan says



she made the best business decision of her career. "I changed our name to Waterfront Properties and decided to specialize—truly specialize—in waterfront properties. That was a big moment."

In her mid-50's at the time, Joan says she wasn't ready to go "gung ho." But, Rob was. "He pushed it. My son had some really good ideas. I'm happy moving in step with his vision. Why not? He's got a pretty good track record." She called her partnership with Rob a union of great balance. She recounted how, over time, "Our ideas began to merge."

Joan has been married twice to the same man, Rob's father. In 2010, he passed away. At about this time, Joan turned over the day-to-day business of Waterfront to Rob completely, but hers is no swan song. She is still heavily involved in the marketing aspect of the company, maintaining full control of the company's complex and voluminous direct mail department, personally drafting

and proofing every single piece of collateral to leave the office.

Today, Joan is an integral part of Waterfront's training team, schooling new agents in what can only be called the Waterfront way. From contact to contracts, there's a process. Asked if she taught the process's fundamentals, allowing her charges to then make it their own, Joan gave another surprising answer, "Not so much!" Rob added, "No one tells a chili chef at the most popular restaurant in town that they want to add a few spices to make the house recipe their own." Joan Thomson is the chef who perfected the original and still winning Waterfront recipe, and she remains a well-known and trusted expert in one of the nation's trendiest zip codes.

Clearly, Joan also still loves the job. "What else would I do? I know how busy my sons are. My work life actually keeps me involved and vital in their lives. It's great! I have to

see mom' isn't something they say. Our lives intersect naturally."

Despite best intentions, this article simply could not be a look back. Joan Thomson has too much on the table in the here and now for that. Which means it's probably safe to start the card game without her.

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