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# Next Door NEIGHBORS

an exclusive publication for community residents

Meet  
the Cohens:  
On the Run  
in Tioga

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Cover photo: Tammy Portrait Artist



## Meet the Cohens: On the Run in Tioga

*For* the last 20 years or so, David and Donna Cohen have been on the run. David has been for a bit longer.

“David has always been a huge runner, before running was popular – he’s really hard core,” Donna said. “It was only when we got down here to Gainesville that I started running with him. We got into the Florida Track Club – I was actually executive director of it for four years; it’s a volunteer job. And David’s done six marathons and I’ve done nine.”

Even more amazingly, David didn’t run his first marathon – all 26.2 miles of it – until after his 60th birthday.

It was Donna who inspired him by running the inaugural Disney marathon at Walt Disney World in 1994. That year, David was sidelined with bad knees, but nevertheless participated in the race as a volunteer. “He saw all these people and thought, ‘if they could do it, I could do it,’” Donna said.

The next year, he and Donna ran both the Disney and New York Marathons together. In the latter race, they were accompanied by David’s daughter-in-law, a veteran racer with 29 marathons under her belt. “We didn’t exactly run together – but we started together!” Donna said.

Their joint running career – and many

other blessings in their lives – started with their move to Gainesville from upstate New York in 1979. At the time, David was in the clothing industry and had come to the area to pursue a business opportunity running a chain of stores based in Ocala. He and Donna, whom he was to marry later that year, chose Gainesville as their home base for its college-town energy and culture.

But way back in 1979, Gainesville still wasn’t quite what they were used to back in New York.

“We wanted to get married here and decided that this was going to be our home,” Donna recalled, “and David’s Jewish and I’m Catholic, so we thought we’d like an in-

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terfaith ceremony with a rabbi and a Catholic priest – neither one of them wanted to have anything to do with it! Gainesville back then was not New York – so we ended up with a judge at the Thomas Center.”

Despite this bump, they never regretted moving here. “I thought, ‘oh, we’d be here about four or five years,’” Donna said. “Now we’d never live anywhere else.”

She and David love a lot about their adopted hometown. For one, the relatively mild weather has allowed David’s passion for running to flourish.

“I’ve been running since forever, and I’ve always wanted to do a marathon, but living up north, it was harder to train and I didn’t have people to train with,” David said. “When we got down here, we had a whole bunch of folks we could run with.”

“This is a running town,” Donna added. “There are some big-time runners here, and I kind of got into it – David’s the one who got me into running, and we’ve made tons of friends running.”

Crazy as they are about running, David and Donna love other things about Gainesville too.

“There’s lot to do – David loves sports. I love football,” she said. “And that’s another thing – when I first got here, I thought, ‘these people are crazy – and orange and blue? Those are the worse colors! What’s going on around here? Their entire social season revolves around football!’ Now, I’m probably the worst offender – we have to get there five hours before the game, we tailgate at Alumni Hall, we have every possible piece of orange and blue bling that you can imagine! It’s that same old thing – if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em – and it’s been great fun.”

Part of the fun has involved opportunities to develop themselves professionally. David eventually transitioned from retail to real estate – he’s currently a realtor with Coldwell Banker – and Donna has established her own career as an interior designer.

“I work with all kinds of people – I do both commercial and residential,” Donna said. “It’s a very interesting animal, interior design. It’s kind of like being a hairdresser – you get to know people very intimately and be a part of their lives. I love to do remodel-

*Continued on page 6.*

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# Meet the Cohens

*Continued from page 5.*



eling, so I get to spend several months in somebody's house –you get to know their lifestyle, what they like and don't like. And I'd say sixty percent of my clients become friends of ours."

Among her projects are their own home – designed around their propensity for socializing and throwing large parties (their outdoor kitchen and patio area will be featured in the Junior League's Tour of Kitchens this month). Another special project was her stepdaughter and son-in-laws' home in Atlanta, which she decorated from a distance shortly before their recent wedding.

Ties to family are important to both David and Donna. David has two grown children (now 51 and 46) from a previous marriage, and Donna is close not only to the two of them, but also to their mother. "I love them like my own children," she said. "And his ex is very friendly – she comes down for all our holidays."

David is also proud that his kids take after him in one important respect – they're

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both passionate about running and fitness.

"My son moved to near Boulder, to Beaver Creek – he's a broker based in New York, works for Bloomberg," David said. "So now he's out there. The market here opens at nine, so he starts there at seven; and it stops there at four and stops there at two. Then he either bikes, skis, mountain bikes, or snowshoes!"

"And their kids, who are now grown, are just like them," Donna said. "They were all here over Thanksgiving. They'd get up in the morning, and it's like 'this group's going to the gym, this group's going to the other gym for spin class, this group's going out for a run' – it's constant!"

The only immediate family still living with them, however, are their two loyal Bichon Frise dogs, Cooper and Chloe. And dogs are another big thing in their household – David, a dedicated animal lover, regularly volunteers at UF's Small Animal Hospital.

"Actually, I'm sort of like a Wal-Mart greeter," Dave said with a laugh.

"He has a little blue vest that he wears.

"Donna said. "And he's what they call a patient advocate."

"I go in and talk to the animals," Dave explained. "I scratch their ears – they do such great stuff there, I just want to give back."

Donna also does a lot of volunteer work. Among her other current responsibilities, she has been a long-time volunteer with Peaceful Paths. "I've been with them 22, 23 years. And I actually initiated their major fundraiser, which is the Guest Chefs party, so I was kind of the founder of that," she said. "I work with the Viva Hospice as a fundraiser, and I'm the head of the dining room decorating committee. I'm with Women's Giving Circle, and at my church, I volunteer on the bereavement committee."

"She does a lot – plus, she's a fabulous cook," David added.

"I like to cook everything – it's very relaxing to me," Donna said. "Cooking for people, I love – and this is a great neighborhood to do that because we have so many great neighbors."

The sense of community that they've discovered in Gainesville – and in Tioga in particular – is another thing they love about living here. "We saw it when it was being developed and we wondered what it would be like to live there," Donna said. "But now that we've moved here, we wouldn't live anywhere else." ●

An advertisement for Carpet One Floor & Home. The top half features a close-up of a golden retriever's face resting on a wooden floor. The Carpet One logo is in the top right corner. The text "Need New Flooring?" is written in a large, white, serif font across the middle. The bottom section has a teal background with the Carpet One logo and address: "7321 N. W. 4th Blvd. Gainesville, FL. 32607 TOWER CENTER 352-332-0067".

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An advertisement for Roto-Rooter Plumbing & Drain Service. The background is bright yellow. On the left, it says "We'll fix any leak." Below this is a coupon box with "\$20 OFF Any Service" and terms: "Present coupon at time of service. One discount per visit. Participating locations only. Coupon code 419." In the center is a baby wearing a white diaper. On the right, it says "Well, almost any." Below this is the Roto-Rooter logo and phone number: "(352) 373-7828".

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