

LAKE MARY

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SENIORS FIND FITNESS & FELLOWSHIP AT LAKE MARY YMCA

BY KRISTIN HARMEL

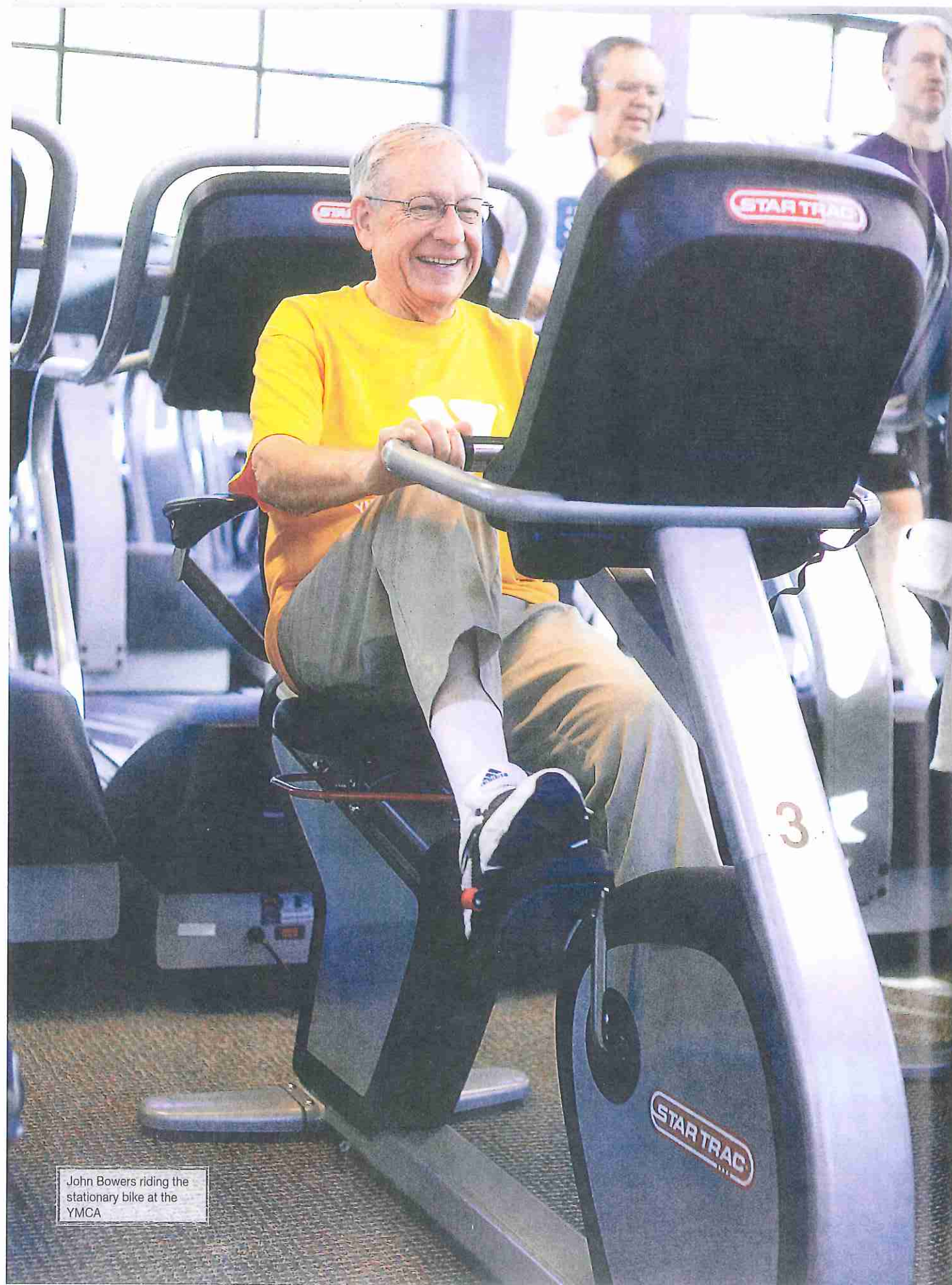
When John and Marcia Bowers began going to Lake Mary's J. Douglas Williams YMCA Family Center in June, they had an idea of what to expect. After all, the Lake Mary couple — both now retired — had been to other YMCAs around the country in the '80s and '90s. But now that they're no longer working and have more time to dedicate to exercise, they've both experienced a transformation they didn't see coming.

"I've not only maintained my fitness level, but I've increased it," says Marcia, 65. "Especially the aerobic part. I've strengthened my muscles in both my upper and lower body."

Says her husband, John, 71, "I feel much better, but I feel the change especially in my legs."

For seniors such as the Bowerses, though, there's more to going to the Y than simply a change in strength or aerobic fitness.

"The main focus is to help seniors maintain the fitness they already have, improve their range of motion and help them with everyday activities," explains Lauren Chanadet, a senior wellness director at the J. Douglas Williams YMCA. "Regular exercise helps them to prolong their lives, to ward off some chronic diseases, and to improve their current condition so they can live happily and stay mobile while they live everyday life."



John Bowers riding the stationary bike at the YMCA



L-R: Shirley O'Connor, Marcia Bowers and Anne Davison

Of the J. Douglas Williams YMCA's 2,700 members, an estimated 1,075 are 65 and over, says Maryalicia Johnson, the senior director of media relations and public awareness for the YMCA of Central Florida. Perhaps that's because the center offers such an appealing and welcoming atmosphere for seniors.

"The Y is like a big family," says Anne Davison, 71, who's been going to the center since 1995. "Certainly there are places that cost you less, but it's only to use the machines. I think it's pretty hard to duplicate that feeling of friendship you find at the Y. There's even a coffee hour. One of the guys here said to me, 'It replaces the



have a cup of coffee and enjoy time with friends who also have fitness goals."

Shirley O'Connor, who's been going to the Y for two years, agrees.

"It's been a very rewarding and enjoyable experience," says O'Connor, 80. "The people who are employed there are all so friendly and nice to you and know you by name, and they're lovely people."

Seniors who have never been to a gym — or have never been to a YMCA — shouldn't hesitate to come in to check things out, Chanadet says.

"Sometimes, seniors are apprehensive or nervous if they've never been, but as they start to work with us and meet friends who have had success, you can almost see a light bulb go on in their head," she says. "Soon, they're looking forward to exercising."

The results, says O'Connor, are tangible.

"I'm not as tired as I used to be," she says. "I have much more energy. I feel very healthy, and my doctor even told

me, 'Come back in a year, I don't need to see you, because you're doing so well.' I attribute that to the Y."

Marcia and John Bowers, too, have seen a big change.

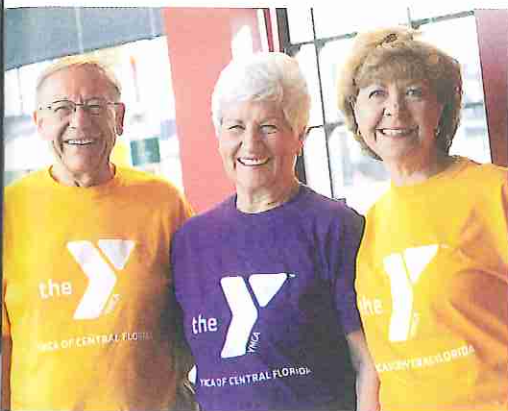
"As much as we love going there, it's a means to an end," says Marcia. "They

offer a schedule to us. It helps us to stay on schedule and stay motivated. It gives us reinforcement. We are very active and always have been in terms of wanting to travel, and doing housework and yard work. We're able to maintain all of that, the lifestyle we love, because we're staying in shape." ❁

The J. Douglas Williams YMCA offers numerous programs geared toward seniors, including basic chair fitness, basic beginner fitness classes, low-impact water aerobics and SilverSneakers, a senior wellness program financed by several insurance companies. The center also offers FitLinxx, a computerized system that allows users to access a pre-set workout routine — designed specifically for each user by a wellness coach to track their progress.



Top: Marcia, Anne and John stretch to increase flexibility
Bottom: Shirley walking on the treadmill



John, Anne and Marcia

camaraderie you had when you worked,' and I think he's right."

Davison, who has even vacationed with friends she met at the Y, adds that she's formed a social circle composed of people from all over the age spectrum — not just other seniors.

"It's just a fellowship that I don't think you can find in other places," she says. "There are a lot of places you can go to, but they don't have a place where you can sit and