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SPORTS & RECREATION

Palm City swimmer, 75, earns bronze medal at senior games

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Special to Neighborhood Post

Like many New Yorkers, 75-year-old Ray Bowles moved to South Florida upon his retirement 10 years ago. But unlike most, the Westchester County native and former speech therapist actually retired to South Florida in order to become more active.

He chose to live in Martin Downs Country Club in Palm City largely because of its Martin Downs Sports Resort, which featured a 25-yard pool that Bowles found well-suited to perfecting his swimming strokes.

Such practice paid off in his bronze medal in the 500-yard freestyle race at this year's National Senior Games, held June 28-30 in Houston.

"Twenty-five yard pools are rare," Bowles said, "so when I saw it, I told my wife, 'This is where we're going to buy.' It definitely helped me medal at the National Senior Games. You have to win at the county level, and then at least place at the state meet, to get into the nationals. And then you race only in events in which you at least placed."

He started swimming at an early age, but didn't compete in the sport until he attended Manhattan College.

"I grew up about 25 miles north of New York City," he said, "but started to swim at around 6 years old in a pond, and we swam fast because of the muck,



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Ray Bowles wears the bronze medal he won in the 500-yard freestyle at the National Senior Games in Houston. He used the 25-yard pool behind him at Martin Downs Country Club in Palm City to improve his strokes for the competition.

turtles and snakes at the bottom. I learned all the different strokes at age 13 through an American Red Cross program, and became a lifeguard. At Manhattan College, the coach saw me swimming and said that I had to be on his team."

Yet Manhattan College focused more on basketball, so the swim program languished in relative obscurity. Bowles then put competition on hold to focus on his career, marriage (he and his wife Pauline celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in May) and family. The couple has a 40-year-old daughter, Jennifer, and a 36-year-old son, Geoffrey.

Retirement at Martin

Downs allowed Bowles use of the facility's 25-yard pool to fuel his passion for winning in the National Senior Games. He first competed in Louisville, Ky. in 2007, where he finished just short of several medals.

"I took fourth place in the 50 breaststroke, 50 freestyle and 100 freestyle in 2007," Bowles said, "so I was determined to get a medal this year."

At 5-foot-10 and 155 pounds, Bowles is a rarity — a man with the same dimensions he graduated from high school with more than 55 years ago. His recipe is a sensible diet and a rigorous yet balanced workout program.

"Some days I swim

for distance and strength," Bowles said. "Today, for instance, I did 70 laps, which is close to a mile. Other days are for sprinting drills, and I'll swim a little less on the days that I play tennis."

Bowles timed it well in winning a medal at the 2011 National Senior Games, in which participants must be at least 50 years old and compete in five-year incremental age groups.

"I'd just aged up to the 75-79 group," he said. "There's always a little advantage when you first move up like that, and the older you get, the bigger that advantage becomes."

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