

Jan Soltys and her Birdman from Illinois

Getting to Know You

A monthly feature about the people in your
On Top of the World community

by John Koning

Jan and Ted Soltys will soon celebrate their 54th wedding anniversary and Ted has always maintained that he loves Jan more than anything else in the world.

I'd really like to take him at his word, but a little birdie told me that this might not be entirely true.

A few years back, in 1936, when Ted was a young boy, and long before he met Jan, he lived next to a racing pigeon enthusiast in Chicago. As he watched across the fence, Ted became enthralled with these magnificent birds.

The neighbor noted Ted's interest and gave the youngster a bird of his own. That simple gesture launched a life-long passion for Ted.

Now, I would never go on the record saying Ted loved his birds more than Jan, but the fact remains that, during our interview, he spent more time recounting his pigeon racing glory days than he did bragging about his beautiful wife.

It's important to point out, the racing pigeons we are talking about here, are not the city dwelling statue defacers that clutter our parks. They are regal birds with historic pedigree and a noble heritage, and they provided life-saving messenger service during both World Wars.

During Ted's active racing years, he managed up to 200 of these competitors at a time and was well known for his knack for picking and produc-

ing consistent winners.

Ted first met Jan on June 6, 1958, dancing at the popular Holiday Ballroom in Chicago, and the two were wed a year later to the day.

They went on to take real estate classes together, they took their realtor exams together and worked for the same company.

From their modest beginnings in a converted gas station, to their ultimate positions as leading realtors, they did it all together.

Not everyone can work side by side 24/7 while raising four children, but these two pulled it off in winning style.

Ted and Jan are recognized in their home town of Elmhurst, Ill., for much more than Ted's racing prowess.

The dynamic duo built a solid reputation in real estate, amassing mega sales that garnered Ted the title of No. 1 producer for Re/Max® in the Chicago area in 1982.

How did Jan and Ted do this?

It was a combination of teamwork, clever marketing strategies and the uncanny ease with which both Jan and Ted can strike up a conversation with just about anyone.

One of the benefits of their business success was the opportunities they had to travel. Of the many exotic places they've explored, none was as meaningful as their journey to Poland. The opportunity arose when a group of American attorneys travel-



Jan and Ted Soltys have made many friends at the Wagon Wheel Flea market, including Stan Boryszewski (center).

ing to Poland were in need of an interpreter and enlisted Ted, who is American born, but speaks and understands Polish. Ted brokered a deal to include Jan and their daughter, Jane, as travel partners.

Once the business purposes of the trip were concluded, Ted, Jan and Jane had the opportunity to explore the land of Ted's ancestors.

On a deeply sad note, they witnessed the horrible images and relics of Auschwitz and paid their respects to the millions of Jews who died there at the hands of the Nazis.

On the other hand, they capped off their trip with a visit to the spectacular ski resort, Zakopane, in the Polish alpine region.

Now that Florida is on their list of homes, Jan and Ted love to explore here, too. One of their favorite Saturday excursions is the Wagon Wheel

Flea Market. There they watch people and buy treasures for their 14 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Not surprisingly, they also make new friends at the market weekly.

Notably, among their new acquaintances, is Stan, a watch salesman and repairman at Booth B115 in the market. They were pleasantly surprised to discover they all have something in common. Like Ted's parents, Stan also hails from Poland and he provided Ted with some Polish conversational practice.

Now, if the Birdman of Illinois can just convert Stan to pigeon racing ...

(Do you know someone in our community whom we should get to know? Send your suggestions to jck@johnkoning.com)

On Top of the World.
Communities

Box Office

Club Pages • Events • Room Maps

visit the otowclearwaterinfo.com Website, click the Rec Centers link followed by the Box Office link