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LINDA CHARLTON / CORRESPONDENT



At 83, Richard De Fran more active now than most people half his age

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Richard De Fran, 83, is giving aging a run for its money.

That's because he refuses to slow down, staying as active in his golden years as he was when he was younger.

He chalks it up to the attitude he's developed about growing older: embracing it instead of

fighting it.

"There's a book I'm reading now, and in the beginning of it, they say the whole thing is inebriating people's thinking that just because they are 80 or 75, it's the end of their life, and that it's just not true. They should be able to live to be 120," De Fran said. "A lot of it has to do with



proper diet in order to feel well, and I'm very much aware of it, but I believe staying active is a big factor. I

think it could help other seniors, too, but along with it goes a certain discipline and perseverance and sitting in front of the television, to me, is not perseverance."

"I also think people

need to get over the I'm-too-old syndrome."

De Fran is the oldest member of both the Lake County Rowing Association and the Imperial Symphony Orchestra in Lakeland, where he plays viola. He also studies viola at Florida Southern College, is involved in the restoration of antique cars, has taken up playing the bagpipes and traditional Native American

flute and practices T'ai Chi and archery.

De Fran, who has suffered from ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) since he was a young child, also thinks his condition plays a small factor in his motivation to keep moving.

"As a child, I was diagnosed with ADHD, and now, as a senior citizen, it's progressed or at least, it hasn't subsided. That,

along with perseverance, keeps me going," De Fran said. "And sure, I have my aches and pains. I have hypertension and I do have some joint pain, but T'ai Chi helps with that. I won't give into it."

De Fran said he imagines he'll have to settle down a little bit eventually, but even then he won't sit and relax in front

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of the tube.

"I'd like get back into watercolor painting and tackle the closet full of exotic model airplanes and boats I have put away and finish building those," he said, adding that in reflecting back throughout his lifetime, he's never really had a boring or inactive period.

As a child, De Fran was raised on the lake, so he was constantly going out on a rowboat, a sailboat and a canoe. Later in his life, De Fran said he even lived on a sailboat with his two Siamese cats in Coconut Grove for five years.

De Fran also played the violin as a child and the tuba in high school and at

the age of 12, he invested in flying lessons with money he saved from his newspaper route and became certified as a private pilot with a sea plane and glider rating. At one time, he owned his own glider.

De Fran attended college at Syracuse University and, there, his main classrooms were right next to an indoor rowing facility. He said it always caught his eye, though he never tried it until last year when he joined the LCRA. He did, however, dabble in cross country skiing.

"I've never been athletic, just active," said De Fran.

After college, De Fran became an industrial designer with CBS Labs in Stafford, Conn. and worked in research and development for many years. There, he helped

design a satellite camera that was used to photograph the moon.

Today, De Fran, well versed in many topics, can hold his own when it comes to conversations on just about any topic, but, you may have to catch him between activities.

"I can't picture myself slowing down," he said.

Paul McPherson, president of the LCRA, said he remembers when De Fran first sat on a rowing machine last June at Lake Minneola. He said he was happy to welcome De Fran to the club because it solidified what he always tells people – that rowing is a sport for people of any age.

"Richard is a testament to that. He's got a lot of energy," McPherson said. "We like welcoming people like that."