

{ADVOCATE}

Monty Trainer

The president of this month's Coconut Grove Arts Festival and namesake of one of the city's most storied raw bars reflects on the good life.

He'll talk with you about art, food, community, friends — even about his brief time in a minimum-security prison. But Monty Trainer won't discuss his age.

"Age is a number," he said. "Mine just happens to be unlisted."

Trainer's life has been full of only-in-Florida excitement. The Key West native graduated from University of Florida in 1967. Two years later, he opened Monty's Raw Bar in Coconut Grove, an institution that continues to thrive, albeit under different ownership.

In 1989, Trainer pleaded guilty to one count of tax-evasion, a charge that led to a short stint in a Pensacola penitentiary and hours of community service. "I was supposed to do 2,500 hours but ended up doing 10,000," he said. "It passed by so quickly I didn't even realize it."

Trainer said the conviction helped him grow as a person, and he was grateful at the reactions he received when he returned to Coconut Grove.

AT HOME IN THE GROVE

As the festival and the city around it have grown, Trainer said he still appreciates the old-world comforts of Coconut Grove.

"Miami has changed a lot, [but] the Grove hasn't really changed," he said. "The new towers and construction won't do anything but embellish the Grove. It doesn't impact the way we live."

He calls the Courtyard Marriott home — it was the Coconut Grove Hotel when he first moved in — just a half-block from his old restaurant that he sold decades ago. He's been there 16 years. He likes it.

"They make your bed, clean your kitchen and you don't have to do anything," he said with a laugh. "Everyone knows you. It's really nice."

His kitchen isn't that big — "adequate for a bachelor" — and uses it mostly for breakfast, a couple times a week. As a diabetic, he eats a lot of steamed vegetables, but still manages to dine out often.

'For the most part, I don't eat stone crabs. I've had my fill.'

"Nobody looked at me with a jaundiced eye," he said. "I had done something right because everyone welcomed me with open arms. I had a community believing in me."

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

He tries to give back to that community through, among other things, his ongoing role as president of the Coconut Grove Arts Festival. This year's festival will be the first in the show's 54-year history without its founder, Charlie Cinnamon, who died in November.

"Charlie was wonderful," Trainer said. "Anything we needed, he was always there for us. I have a picture of us over my desk."

Cinnamon, a longtime and beloved Miami theater press agent who, like Trainer, was famously private about his age, started the festival in 1963 as a way of promoting a Coconut Grove Playhouse production.

The Coconut Grove Arts Festival has grown into an internationally recognized, juried show that attracts more than 120,000 visitors a year over President's Day Weekend to view the works of about 360 artists. The three-day event encompasses visual arts, musical performances and culinary demonstrations, among other family-friendly entertainment.

"I entertain at the Sonesta Hotel, and I'm there quite a bit," he said. "It's the greatest view in all of Miami."

Inside the Sonesta is the Panorama Restaurant & Sky Lounge, where Trainer likes to order the shrimp tempura and Caprese salad. He still enjoys seafood quite a bit — if not as much as he did when he ran Monty's.

"For the most part, I don't eat stone crabs," Trainer said. "I've had my fill of stone crabs and lobster."

WORDS BY DORI ZINN / PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK GARCIA / SHOT ON LOCATION AT GLASS & VINE IN COCONUT GROVE

COCONUT GROVE ARTS FESTIVAL

When: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. February 18-20.
Where: Along McFarlane Road, South Bayshore Drive and Pan American Drive in Coconut Grove.
Admission: \$15 a day; \$5 for Coconut Grove residents; free for children 12 and under.
More info: cgaf.com.



SONESTA RESTAURANT & SKY LOUNGE (SHRIMP)