

Entomologist Bill Todaro stays busy at figure skating competitions

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Bill Todaro, 68, skates with his former partner Margaret Bakke of Cleveland at the U.S. Adult Figure Skating Championships in 2014.

By Kathy Samudovsky

At age 68, Bill Todaro has no plans to slow down and take it easy, saying he prefers to live his senior years at full throttle.

He could have retired as an entomologist for Allegheny County Health Department, but he said he finds the study of insects too fascinating to give up.

What's more, on evenings and weekends, he works at achieving peak fitness and health with his favorite pastime — competitive pairs ice dancing.

Mr. Todaro, of Reserve, has won five gold medals in amateur-level U.S. adult figure skating championships across the country in recent years.

“I skate because I love it,” he said. “When I’m on the ice it’s a happy feeling; it’s pure joy. I love the moves and the music, and I love dancing with women. It gives me a good excuse for staying in shape.”

Mr. Todaro has won these championships with former skating partner Janet Gallaway of Mt. Lebanon: the pre-bronze dance category in Lake Placid, N.Y., 2008; bronze dance and adult bronze pairs, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2009; pre-silver dance, Bloomington, Minn., 2010; and silver dance, Bensenville, Ill., 2012.

“The year we won pairs [2009], I couldn’t believe it,” he said. “I was the oldest and smallest guy. We were hot stuff back then.”

When Ms. Gallaway stopped skating due to an injury, Mr. Todaro partnered with Margaret Bakke of Cleveland for adult national competitions. In 2013, they placed second in silver dance in Scottsdale, Ariz., earning a silver medal. In 2014, they competed in pre-gold dance in Cape Cod, Mass., but finished in last place “due to some technical rule violation,” he said.

Mr. Todaro hasn’t competed since last spring when Ms. Bakke had to stop for travel-related reasons. He’s been searching for a new female partner. In the meantime, he skates solo freestyle dance.

He’s the oldest of about 15 adult skaters in the Pittsburgh Figure Skating Club, a member club of U.S. Figure Skating, the nation’s governing body for the sport. He and other club members train and practice at Robert Morris University Island Sports Center on Neville Island.

To stay in shape, he works out in a gym, lifts weights, rides a bike, swims laps, stands instead of sits at his desk at work and manages a half-acre vegetable garden at home. He also takes yoga, Pilates and core strength classes.

The sport itself increases muscle strength and improves flexibility, balance and coordination, he said.

Mr. Todaro — aka “the bug man” at work — was introduced to ice skating by cockroaches.

In November 1997, the county health department, which inspects food service establishments, would not let North Park Skating Rink open its concession stand because “the entire building was loaded with cockroaches,” he said, noting that the county’s extermination contractor could not control the infestation.

He became involved and applied a new bait formulation of pesticide. Within two months, all of the cockroaches were gone, leaving the rink manager so ecstatic that he asked Mr. Todaro, “Can you skate?”

When Mr. Todaro said no, the rink manager said, “Want to learn? You can have free lessons for the rest of your life if you want.”

The following week, at age 50, he took the first of many ice skating lessons alongside the children.

“He’s always been very young at heart,” said Mr. Todaro’s wife, Cheryl.

Upper St. Clair resident Rachel Lane-McCarthy, Mr. Todaro’s skating coach, called him “unstoppable” and “inspiring.”

She said his trademark is “a constant expression of joy” while skating. People stop to watch him on the ice all the time because of it,” she said.

On Sunday, Mr. Todaro will participate in the annual Janney & the Y North Park Triathlon, at which he finished first in his age category last year.

“I really don’t think about my age,” he said. “I still feel like a kid inside because nothing is holding me back from doing what I want. I plan to keep skating until I’m 80.”

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