



BEST FRIENDS

By Cheryl Van Tuyl Jividen :: Photography by Jason Risner



IT'S A WISH MOST OF US HOPE FOR —
THAT ONE SPECIAL PERSON WHO GETS YOU LIKE NO
ONE ELSE DOES — BUT FOR JOE AND MAUREEN CHEBEN
IT'S A LONG-TIME REALITY THAT DEFINES THEIR LIVES.

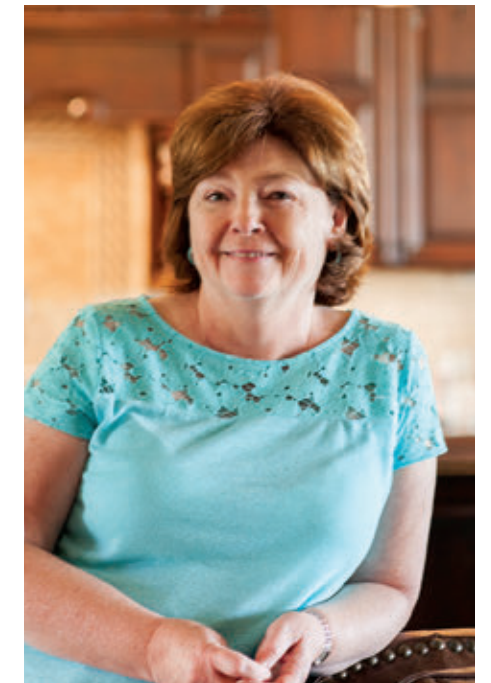




The blessing of their friendship is not quite lifelong; it could have easily started much earlier. Both natives of the Bronx, they were born a mere three blocks from each other the very same year. "It's a small world and our relationship was meant to be," says Joe whose family moved away to Queens when he was four years old. "Maureen and I met at Manhattan College the first day of Freshman Calculus class. I tripped over her in the hallway so I would have an excuse to talk to her," Joe says of the fortunate encounter. "We are the best of friends and have been since college. We were actually best friends before we started dating." He jokes, "We had to be because Maureen always cheated off me when taking tests." The two chemical engineers got married in New Jersey about a year after they started their careers and will celebrate their 39th anniversary this June.

When they were transferred to Houston in 1977 they got their first taste of Texas, attending the University of Houston where they both got their MBAs. With studies behind them they started their family and with the birth of son Mark, Maureen decided to retire from her career. Over the course of their careers they worked together three years at Exxon which had them living all over the country and abroad; first with Exxon in Den Haag, Holland from 1991-1994 and then with ExxonMobil in Qatar from 2008-2012. "Exxon introduced us to Texas when they moved us down from New Jersey. We did not know anything about it. But we loved it as soon as we arrived. We have now lived in Texas longer than any other place, by far. When we lived in Houston, we would go to the Hill Country in the spring to see the wildflowers," says Maureen.

Their family grew up and expanded. Mark, 33, lives in Irvine, California where he is the Global Marketing Manager for EonReality, a 3D visualization company. Joe also works for them as an advisor/consultant for their oil and gas business. "Mark is a full-time employee and I am a consultant, so technically he's my boss and he never lets me forget it," says Joe of his oldest son. Son Sean is 30 and he and his wife Brittany are both chemical engineers living in Houston. Sean works for Chevron



and is very active in Texas politics. Brittany just got her MBA from Rice University and works for DCP Midstream, an oil and gas company. Daughter, Amy, 28, is a mechanical engineer for Southwest Research Institute and she and her husband, Tyler live in San Antonio where he's an aerospace engineer and private pilot who works for Boeing. "All of our kids and their spouses are brainiacs and it's tough to keep up with them," Joe says.

When the time came to think about their next chapter, the Chebens had multiple considerations. "About 10 years ago, when we started to consider retirement,

we looked at several other states to live in. We looked at New York and New Jersey, but they were too crowded and too expensive. We looked at Pennsylvania, and while nice, it just wasn't for us. We also looked in North and South Carolina since some of our friends retired there. Again, too crowded. Maureen then said, 'Honey, we can do this 50 times, but you know we'll wind up in Texas.' She was right. I asked her where she would like to live and she said, 'You know we love the Hill Country, how about we try for San Antonio to get away from the coast, the humidity and hurricanes.' We Googled 'San Antonio,



JOE AND SON MARK SUMMITED KILIMANJARO ON DECEMBER 2, 2014 AFTER AN EIGHT-DAY CLIMB. IT WAS JUST THE TWO OF THEM BUT THEIR SUPPORT GROUP OF GUIDES AND PORTERS TOTALED 13. THEIR GUIDE BABOO IS PICTURED WITH JOE AND MARK DURING AN ACCLIMATIZATION HIKE.

golfing, gated community' and Cordillera was the first hit. We called and made an appointment." It was love at first sight. "As soon as we turned into Cordillera and drove up to the sales office, we both knew it was where we were going to retire. The killer view from the sales office, the beautiful roll of the land, the size of the lots, what we heard about the warmth and friendliness of the people, all contributed to the decision to put down our stakes here."

Finding the right lot took a bit longer. The couple was living in Qatar and would travel back to Texas every three months to look for lots. After about a year, they found the right one.

The couple chose Cordillera Ranch Preferred Builder Trey Garner, and with Maureen working closely with his designer Amy Henderson, it took about a year to perfect the home design to Maureen's ideal specifications. "We can't say enough about Trey and his team. They are a great group of folks to work with. We had no surprises during the construction and everything progressed very smoothly," says Maureen. They moved into their home in July, 2012.

One of the couple's favorite rooms is the beautiful kitchen where Maureen puts her excellent cooking skills to use for family and friends and Joe creates his prized baked confections. "About 15 years ago, Maureen taught me how to bake cheesecakes, lemon meringue pies and chocolate cream pies. I've perfected the recipes over the years," says Joe. "My favorite cheesecake to make is an amaretto cheesecake. Most of the time, we make a cheesecake for each Nature Club

meeting where it is raffled off as one of the door prizes. But some people who have not won at the raffle have asked for a cheesecake to be made. We have a lot of fun making them and watching people enjoy them."

The home is also the setting for entertaining. "When we're home and not traveling, we enjoy having friends over to the house a couple of times per month. It's very enjoyable," says Maureen. Additionally, its home base for their visiting children, especially during the holidays. Joe shares specifics, "We all seem to get together here around Thanksgiving which is our favorite holiday. When everyone is together, we play a lot of strategic board games and drink copious quantities of beer. We also like to go to the gun range and shoot clays, before any drinking is done, of course! Around Christmas, we enjoy going to the mariachi mass at Mission Concepcion followed by brunch at the Menger."

An active couple, the Chebens enjoy lots of activities and supporting the local community. "We coordinate the quarterly trash pick-up on our Adopt-A-Highway section of 46. We actively support the San Antonio Pregnancy Care Center, the Hill Country Pregnancy Care Center, The Kendall County Women's Shelter and 4Kids of South Texas," says Joe. They are also enthusiastic gardeners growing flowers in harmony with the deer. "We are total at peace with the deer. I drink a lot of coffee and spread the coffee grounds throughout all our gardens to acidify the soil. I understand that the odor also keeps the deer away."

The couple makes use of their favorite Cordillera amenities — The Clubhouse, the golf course and the gun range, for fun close to home. "Maureen plays Shanghai. I used to play golf and am now trying to get back into playing. We both belong to the Nature Club. I attend the monthly Men's Group meeting when I'm in town and we occasionally go to the wine dinners."

An avid sportsman who played baseball, golf and hockey in his youth, Joe is quite the adventurer. "I got involved in camping, backpacking and mountain climbing when our two sons were in scouts. When they turned 14 years old, they entered the high adventure program and I was the adult sponsor. Through this, we climbed our first 14,000-foot mountain in Colorado. We have since climbed throughout Colorado, in California and Washington, in Mexico, Ecuador, Turkey, Africa and South America. I have climbed over 40 peaks higher than 14,000 feet. It's a great hobby."

Life is good for the Chebens who cite the people and the quiet way of living as what they like most about Cordillera Ranch. At the prospect of grandchildren, they see more special time at home. "We have a feeling that they will spend many days/nights with us here." Until then, Joe says, "We're just living life to the fullest. We have an expression: 'there's nothing better than getting old with your best friend.' We wake up every morning and thank God for giving us such good fortune — living here in Cordillera with such great people." 🍷

