

MARTIN COUNTY

Owner of Peggy's Natural Foods in Hobe Sound since 1982 dies of cancer

**Ananya Tiwari**

Treasure Coast Newspapers

Published 5:31 a.m. ET Feb. 1, 2024 | Updated 3:27 p.m. ET Feb. 1, 2024

Peggy Ranger, who owned the oldest and largest independent health foods store on the Treasure Coast, died Jan. 27 after battling cancer for over a decade. She was 72.

Ranger started Peggy's Natural Foods in a Winn Dixie's shopping center on Bridge Road in Hobe Sound in 1982. She relocated to the Cove Center in Stuart in 1996, then to Martin's Landing in Hobe Sound in 2021.

Peggy's Natural Foods will remain open and "continue to serve the community," executor James Covey said, without specifying who will own it. Ranger is survived by her two sons and former spouse, who live in Florida.

Peggy's Natural Foods: Celebrates 35th anniversary

A former special needs teacher with a master's degree in special education from Florida Atlantic University and certified nutritionist, Ranger was a fierce advocate for health supplements and the natural foods movement. Her store's motto — "real, healthy, local" — reflects her holistic philosophy to health.

"She was a very smart and tough business lady that succeeded for a very long time," said store manager Ryan Costello. "She should have really retired and relaxed, but the store was her life."

Peggy Ranger was a SENPA member, president

Ranger launched her business after seeing her special needs students struggling to concentrate and learn because of a lack of nutrients in their lunches.

Ranger lobbied for the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 to establish standards, which she did on behalf of SENPA, a nonprofit natural products trade association. She was a member for 22 years and its president from 2008-09, said Executive Director Debra Short.

"She attended several fly-ins to Washington, D.C., to talk to our lawmakers up there," Short said.

Ranger also represented the industry in the Martin County Business Exchange, a nonprofit club for business owners, and was a member of the Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce.

Peggy's Natural Foods will be her legacy

Ranger channeled her passion into running her store. She was always eager to give customers and friends advice on nutrition and health products, said Sara Leigh, the store's buyer and social media manager, who began working there when she was a teenager.

"The world feels different without her presence, but we will all do our best to keep her legacy alive through Peggy's Natural Foods," Leigh said. "I'm glad I've been able to be a part of it."

Ranger's outgoing personality won her many friends and customers, such as Mary Ann Loomis.

"She provided the resource, both of herself with the advice and consultation, and with the products that she had in the store," Loomis said. "She was always available when you walked in that store to answer any questions."

Ranger's passion rubbed off on her employees too, Leigh said.

"Working for her taught me so much about nutrition, supplements, eating properly, being your own advocate when it comes to your health and to always trust your gut — valuable things I never could have learned anywhere else."

Ranger had a selfless community spirit, said Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce CEO Lainey Meunich.

"She always was there to say 'yes' to help out the community or any events or anybody else that was going through something," Meunich said.

Friends said Ranger's dedication never flagged, even after she was diagnosed with cancer. Despite being ill, she would attend after-hours events to meet customers and fellow community members.

"She was living proof that anyone could accomplish anything when they put their energy toward it," Leigh said.

Ananya Tiwari is TCPalm's business reporter. You can contact her at ananya.tiwari@tcpalm.com.