There are many recipes for how to conduct a personal life in south Florida. Discarding the unsavory ones that use only the ingredients of self-medication with liberal measures of laziness, I had been told that Fort Lauderdale’s Chuck Nichols had a good one. Because Chuck will be honored on May 6th for his lengthy community service, I decided to acquire his recipe.

At the commodious Coral Ridge home that he and Mark, his partner of 32 years, have shared since moving here 14 years ago, I was unprepared for the distraction of 130 feet of waterfront horticultural paradise. To focus on Chuck, I selected a chair that faced away from the beckoning orchids and congratulated him on his nomination to the Dr. Nan S. Hutchison Broward Senior Hall of Fame honoring elder excellence in the volunteer sector of Broward County. Chuck is a 2010 nominee for his outstanding assistance to people with HIV/AIDS in Broward County.

Chuck was the third President of Tuesday’s Angels, a volunteer agency that provides emergency assistance to financially needy people with HIV/AIDS in Broward. Under his leadership, Tuesday’s Angels has helped thousands of people with HIV/AIDS manage their rent, electric bills, and other expenses. Chuck was also instrumental in providing people with access to public transportation by securing a bus pass program. His work has helped send many children with HIV to summer camps.

Chuck is a modest gentleman who is unaccustomed to talking about his own accomplishments and his history. He trustingly gave me some really juicy stories from his past that I cannot repeat in print. The honor he is about to receive is due to the fact that he has spent his Fort Lauderdale time improving the lives of those among us who are the most needy.

“After my eight years as president of Tuesday’s Angels, they wanted to make me “president emeritus” but I said...
no thank you to that title. Sounds too much like I’ve got a foot in the grave. We settled on “Immediate Past President” and before you ask me anything else, I want you to know something important. I have a phenomenal Board. The work that I have done would not have been impossible without them. Very few organizations take advantage of ‘gray power’ but there are many guys here who aren’t just about the bars or getting cancer by baking on Sebastian beach. I have been lucky to work with many great people who were drawn to this work just as I was when I first moved here.”

This gave me an opportunity to ask about his recipe for successful living in Fort Lauderdale.

“I think your first year down here is critical. You need to find a passion. For me, that was easy. I had already been in the consumer rights field. I was an economist by training and I was into working with numbers and setting standards and finding solutions to benefit people. I’ve always been fascinated by the way things work or don’t work and how they can be improved."

Chuck has a degree in Agricultural Economics from Michigan State University and a graduate degree in Business Economics from the University of Florida. His career in Washington, D.C. included positions with the Food and Drug Administration, Planning Research Corporation and The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

“In Washington, at the CPSC, I worked on setting standards for things like the caps on prescription drugs, and safe cribs for kids. I’m proud to have been a part of something that helped protect people. Then I came down here and thought I would relax on the beach.”

Why didn’t that happen?

“Well, that goes way back to when I first entered the gay world. I saw so much alcoholism that in my mind I began to think ‘gay-equals-alcoholic’. I made it my mission to just get through school and not screw up my life. It kept me focused and that just continued on through work and then living here.”

When Chuck answered my request for his age, my guess was twenty years short of the mark. I was stunned. He is a very attractive 75. Now I really wanted that recipe.

“I go to the gym almost every day. I do Pilates, yoga and weight training. I was determined to create a stress-free environment and as you can see, gardening is a way to achieve that, and something I love doing.”

I told Chuck that I was making a mental note to avoid ever taking the locally offered nude yoga class because, including him, I now had four acquaintances who participate, and that would be much too distracting.

“Oh it’s really not difficult to stay focused. Yoga is better for my head than for my body, although I am sometimes impressed by the view if I am in the second row during a position called the ‘downward facing dog.’”

Chuck fixed the sharp gaze of his clear blue eyes at me to indicate that he was about to tell me something valuable.

“The most important thing in life is to know the impact of your decisions. The big ones and the little ones that you make everyday.”
What is next for Chuck?

“I’m working on an idea and a proposal for a ‘Memorial Garden’ at the Pride Center and the development of a garden club there. It would have two purposes. To bring together guys who love horticulture and to establish a relaxing place for us to memorialize our loved ones.”

Driving home, I knew I would not need to look at my notes to learn Chuck’s recipe for good living. It is simple. Be careful with those around you and help good things grow.

More information, please visit:
http://tuesdaysangels.org/
http://www.adrcbroward.org/upcomingseniorhalloffame.php