Age is relative term in the life of track and field enthusiast JoAnn Sampson.

Each and every day, the 76-year-old Hallandale resident is committed to living life to the fullest. Her creed is "forever young."

The former elementary school teacher retired after 35 years in the profession, and had a void in her life that needed to be fulfilled. She admitted that she surprised herself by discovering a new passion thanks to this area's annual Senior Games.

In 2002, Sampson signed up for the sports competition and it didn't take long for her to excel in the various running events that are part of the Olympics-style extravaganza.
"I retired in August of 2000 after being a teacher and was bored and missing the kids," Sampson said. "I saw an article in the Sun-Sentinel about the Senior Games, but knew nothing about it. There were 34 events, but I was never an athlete."

That didn't stop her from testing the waters, and in early February of 2002 she was entered in her first race.

"I filled out the application, checked the 100-meter box under track and field and got the response that I was entered," Sampson said. "That was quite a while before the race so I had time to prepare."

And prepare she did.

Sampson started walking and training seven days a week rain or shine, and thus started her journey to becoming an athlete at the age of 62. She added some aerobic and Pilates classes, lost some weight and bulked up a bit.

Competing in the 60-64 age division at Boyd Anderson High School in Lauderdale Lakes, Sampson won the gold medal in the 100 meters and qualified for the Senior Games State Championship where she proceeded to garner silver.

"The rest is history and (track) is what I do now," Sampson said. "I start at 5:30 every morning and train five days a week. I have a strength trainer and a track coach. I'm in the best shape I've ever been in and my weight is down to what I weighed in the 12th grade."

Her best time in the 100 meters is 14.78 seconds.

That first race in 2002 was a prelude to some amazing accomplishments on the track as Sampson has brought home quite a few gold, silver and bronze medals in state, national and international competitions. She continues to compete in the USATF (United States of America Track & Field) Masters events.

At the State of Florida Senior Games Championships last December, Sampson struck gold again in the 50- and 100-meter competitions to qualify for the upcoming 2017 Senior National Games in Birmingham, Ala. This marks the ninth time Sampson has qualified for the national championships.

At Sampson's home is a "Wall of Fame," where a treasure cove of over 100 medals is on display.

Even though her preference is the 50-, 100- and even 200-meter races, the track star has also excelled in the 400- and 800-meter events and also in the shot put.

Her love of teaching has opened up other doors.
getting old."

It is more than attaining individual glory that motivates Sampson and she has a message for her fellow senior citizens.

"Stand up for who you are and don't let anyone tell you you're too old. You can do whatever is in your heart. We are a generation of champions," Sampson said.

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