

Meet Merle & Jayne Hill



by Sharleen Nelson

If you ask Marathon Coach Club Vice President Merle Hill about his life, he'll tell you unassumingly that "it's been pretty dull," but Merle and his wife Jayne's life has been anything but.

Raised in the rugged Ozark Mountains of southern Missouri, high school sweethearts Merle and Jayne married after graduating from college—Merle with a degree in metallurgic engineering and Jayne with a degree in biology and math. After college, Merle was offered a position at a small, private company in Marshalltown, Iowa, that provides systems that control the movement of fluids through industrial plants. "It's a business that most people don't know anything about," Merle said. "It's pure industrial; no retail aspect whatsoever." And Jayne taught school.

After four years in Iowa, the company offered Merle the opportunity to work overseas. During the five years they lived in Tokyo, Jayne worked at Citibank and also gave birth to their first daughter. After returning to the states in

1978, they welcomed two more girls into the family. In 1983, they left the Midwest and moved to Seattle, after purchasing the Northwest distributorship from Merle's company.

For 20 years, boating was the family's primary recreational activity—the Hills had never considered buying an RV. "I'd never been in an RV in my life," said Merle. "It wasn't even on our radar," Jayne added. But after attending an RV show in 2000, they decided to purchase their first motorhome. Because at that time they could never be too far away from their business, the Hill's travel consisted mainly of traveling up and down I-5 to visit their grown daughters, who lived along the route between Seattle and San Diego. On occasion, however, they found time to get away for short vacations at a California desert RV resort. While vacationing there, Merle and Jayne began to notice that many of their friends owned Marathon coaches. "A lot of people had these things called 'Marathons,'" said Merle. "We'd never heard of a

Marathon." "Because we traveled up and down I-5 all the time we'd seen Marathon from the interstate, but we had never thought about stopping," Jayne said. "But one time we made the mistake of stopping," added Merle, laughing. "Before we knew it, we had swapped our motorhome for a Marathon coach—our salesman caught us at a weak moment, I guess. The transition to the coach was very easy and was one of the more pleasant buying experiences we've ever had."

After selling their business and retiring in 2005, the couple decided it was time for a real vacation. "A lot of people we knew who had retired that didn't do something died prematurely, many by heart attack," said Merle. "So we said we're going to take two years and travel and enjoy retirement." And with their Marathon coach, the Hills immediately felt right at home. "Because of our familiarity with operating boats we didn't have a problem operating our coach—the basic concept and the economy of space are the same," said Jayne. Merle concurred: "Our coach is a boat on wheels with brakes!"

Although the Hills own homes in Seattle and in the desert, they spend a significant amount of time traveling in their coach, which includes attending Marathon rallies. After attending a few, they not only discovered how fun Marathon rallies truly are, but also that they could build vacation trips around the rally venues. The Hills especially love trips that take them to destinations of historical significance. "Our idea of traveling is going to places such as Charleston, South Carolina, as we did last year," said Merle. "We stayed there for a week. You get out, you get your tour map, and you walk or bike to places." The couple lead an active lifestyle, taking in a round of golf or finding scenic places where they can ride their bicycles. "We often go out and do a 30- or 40-mile ride in a day," said Merle. Future destinations on the map for the Hills include a desire to take historical tours of the east coast and the Midwest; in particular, a walking tour of the Gettysburg battlefields, visiting national parks, and a possible Alaska excursion.

A huge advantage of having the coach is it lets them travel with their two poodles, Tillie and Rascal. "We heard the other day that most dogs have owners. Well, poodles have staff!" Merle said. "Tillie and Rascal travel with us everywhere. They're 2 ½ years old and they're just balls of energy."

According to Jayne, there's never a dull moment with them. "They're good dogs, but there's that initial frenzy," she said. "And Rascal, he thinks he needs to live up to his name. He is really entertaining."

Merle and Jayne appreciate the flexibility their coach provides. Traveling by coach allows them to spend more of their leisure time exploring, and less time checking in and out of hotels. "If you're parked some place and you don't want to go out and run around that day because you're tired, you can stay in bed as long as you want to," said Merle. "Being in your own bed just starts your day better."

Likewise, coach ownership means freedom, especially for the Hills, who have come to a point in their lives where they can travel and fully enjoy the RV lifestyle.

"Jayne and I have known each other a long time; we both come from modest backgrounds and we've worked all of our lives, so we truly appreciate not working," said Merle. "It's time now for us to have fun." "And we figure that we don't want to put off a whole lot because we don't know what tomorrow will bring," Jayne added.

"I heard or read someplace that life isn't a dress rehearsal," said Merle. "That is so true. And Jayne and I have a whole list of things that we still want to see and do before the final curtain." •



Jayne was a registration volunteer at the last club rally.