

In his 13 years as a pro football player, Joe DeLamiellure knew what it was like to take a hard hit and keep coming back. He was one of the blockers for the Buffalo Bills' "Electric Company", the powerful offensive line that paved the way for O.J. Simpson to become the first player to rush for 2,000 yards in a season.

The Buffalo Bills' first round draft pick never missed a practice or a game, from his first season in 1973 to the last one in 1985. He played a few extra games, too, because Joe was selected to the Pro Bowl six times in a row.

In 2003, Joe was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Although Joe's tough play on the field brought him professional success, his life off the field paints a picture of a gentle man who has benefitted far more from hugs than hits.

Family matters

All the way back in first grade, Joe used to walk to school with his friend, Gerri. They lived in a Detroit suburb, where Joe was the ninth of ten kids and Gerri was the oldest of eight siblings. Joe and Gerri stayed friends. When he went off to Michigan State on a football scholarship, Gerri headed to nursing school.

After all the years together as friends, Joe and Gerri finally started dating. They married in 1972, when Joe was a junior in college. That was almost 45 years ago, and they're still together. They both say there was never a time in their lives when they can remember NOT being together.

Joe and Gerri had four children, but having grown up in large families, they were ready for more. When their youngest boy and girl (twins) were about six years old, the couple decided to expand their family. They adopted a Korean infant. Soon after, they adopted a young Korean boy. A few years later, they opened their home to three high school boys who needed a place to live while finishing high school.

Now, their children have blessed them with 12 grandkids.

Joe thanks football for many things, the most important of them being his family.

"Football enabled me to be able to adopt two kids and raise three others. That would never have happened without my pro career."

The game also gave him another family: the other Hall of Famers. He and Gerri have built strong friendships with other members.

“You can drive across the country, stop anywhere, and we will find someone Joe played with or against, or is a Hall of Famer.”

“You meet the greatest players ever, and you become friends with them,” says Joe, humbly. “And as they all say when you become a member of the Hall of Fame, ‘You can’t be cut. You can’t be waived. You’re a Hall of Famer forever.’”

The right home, the right time

After retiring from pro football, Joe did some coaching, training, speaking engagements, and even acted as a host for Bills games for a Buffalo casino. Joe and Gerri moved to Charlotte, NC, in 1983. When they were ready to “right-size” their lives, they drove to surrounding areas, looking for the active 55+ lifestyle.

The DeLamiellures were about to put down a deposit on a home in a community by a nationally recognized developer, but when the rules and restrictions were listed off, they tucked away their checkbook.

“We have 12 grandkids, and didn’t want to live in a place where kids can only visit for limited times, and you can’t leave your car in the driveway overnight.”

Along with their son, they drove four miles down the road and came to Marrington at Cobblestone, an Epcon Community in Summerville, S.C. They walked into a Canterbury that was under construction, and almost complete. Joe looked around and said, “This is it. Let’s not even look any more.”

His son laughed and told the sales associate, “He’ll be the easiest sale in your life. He knows what he wants when he sees it.”

They moved into their new home at Marrington at Cobblestone one week after selling their home in Charlotte. They like the openness of the interior layout and the single-level living. It’s spacious, says Gerri, but not too much space.

In addition to their home, they like the community. Gerri says it’s the perfect blend of friendliness and privacy.

“We love living in Marrington at Cobblestone! It’s one of those neighborhoods where you can say to a neighbor, ‘Hey, I’m going to Charlotte for the weekend. Can you look out for my place?’ And you can be as involved with the social events—or uninvolved—as you like.”

Gerri retired in April 2016 from her job as a pediatric nurse. Joe and his son have a business that sells training bands.

“God smiled on my life,” he says. “I’ve gotten way more than I deserved.”

Joe’s surname—DeLamiellure—is Belgian. It means “of the best”. That pretty much describes the way he has lived his life so far.