

GENERALLY *Speaking*

Joint effort
addresses arthritis

25 years of
Open Heart at
Lancaster General

Healthier eating,
tastefully done

The best defense against
skin cancer

Willow Lakes
expands services

LCPC still all smiles
after 70 years

Comprehensive approach to
weight loss includes surgical options

 Lancaster General
By your side.

Open Heart at Lancaster

Still beating strong after 25 years

Gary Ghee suffered a serious heart attack while on a family trip to Williamsburg, Virginia.

When the 42-year-old Leola resident was well enough to return to Lancaster County, his cardiologist recommended open heart surgery. Gary chose to have his surgery at Lancaster General.

On September 7, 1983, Gary made history, becoming Lancaster General's first open heart surgery patient.

Nearly a quarter century later, both Gary and the hospital's open heart surgery program are still going strong.

"I'm so glad to be alive and ticking after 25 years," Gary says. "Everything has been working fine since my surgery."

He is still working full-time and enjoying life today at age 66. He is grateful that surgery gave him more time with his wife Sheila, plus opportunities like coaching baseball and basketball for his then teenage kids, watching them grow and become successful in their own lives, and now the thrill of spending time with his 6-year-old granddaughter.

Gary had no qualms about being the first to have the surgery at Lancaster General. "I never felt threatened, and I never felt afraid. I was confident in my doctors."

His surgeons that day were Lawrence Bonchek, MD, and Mark Burlingame, MD... both of whom came to Lancaster General with considerable experience in open heart surgery when Cardiothoracic Surgeons of Lancaster opened in 1983.

"To this day I admire Gary for showing that confidence in us and his willingness to be our first patient," Dr. Bonchek says.

Dr. Bonchek was Chairman of the Department of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery at the Medical College of Wisconsin when he was offered the opportunity to start the open-heart program at Lancaster General.

He invited Dr. Burlingame, who at the time was practicing in Michigan. "I knew it was important to bring on board the best people I could find," Dr. Bonchek says. "Dr. Burlingame was the best resident I had at the Medical College."

The inaugural cardiothoracic surgery team also included anesthesiologists Dominic Dorazio, MD and Kenneth Denlinger, MD; Norma Ferdinand, RN, the hospital's first nurse clinician; and Craig Gassman, the perfusionist, who managed the heart-lung machine.

While the plan was to start with one operation every other day and gradually pick up the pace, Dr. Bonchek says word quickly spread among cardiologists about the program's success and within a week they were performing one operation every day.



Gary Ghee (left) and Dr. Lawrence Bonchek (right) enjoy a reunion nearly 25 years after Gary became the first open-heart surgery patient at Lancaster General Hospital.

