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Gene's Story: My Partner for Heart Attack Treatment and Recovery



Gene Burden, heart attack survivor, and his wife Donna.

Warrensburg, MO (June 11, 2020) — When Gene Burden started having incredible chest pain, it did not take long for his wife Donna to rush him to Western Missouri Medical Center's (WMMC) Emergency Room. Gene had a heart attack and this is the story of his amazing recovery.

Recognizing the Signs

In September of 2019, the Burdens were coming home from a trip to Arkansas, and Gene had not felt well. After sitting down for dinner that same evening, Gene began experiencing intense chest pain. As the Warrensburg Police Chief for 32 years, he had experienced pressure in his chest before, but this pain was different – it would not go away and was getting worse.



Donna noticed his abnormal response to the pain, so she rushed him to WMMC's Emergency Room only a few blocks away. Within a matter of minutes of Gene's arrival, he was diagnosed with a STEMI – also known as a heart attack. He was then taken into WMMC's Level III trauma room, a room specifically designated for treating heart attacks, traumas and strokes. There he received the medication needed to stop the damage to his heart.

A heart attack occurs when a part of the heart muscle does not receive enough blood. The more time that passes without treatment to restore blood flow, the greater the damage to the heart.

"I could not ask for any better care," Gene stated. "There were several people in the room running tests and Bryce Weir, RN, was with me the entire time. My pain went away quickly after receiving the medication."

Gene received nitroglycerin and aspirin, common medications for heart attack patients to reduce blood clotting and help maintain blood flow. Once Gene was stabilized and showing signs of recovery, he was transferred to Saint Luke's for standard post-treatment care.

Ensuring Long-Term Results

Heart attacks require immediate diagnosis and need immediate treatment. WMMC's Level III STEMI certification allows WMMC to diagnose and treat heart attacks to preserve the heart and prevent long-term damage.

After heart attack patients receive treatment and are stabilized, they are transferred to a Level I STEMI Center for a cardiac catheterization to diagnosis why the heart attack occurred.

"When I arrived at Saint Luke's, WMMC had done everything that Saint Luke's needed prior to arriving," Gene said. "I was really grateful."

Fortunately, Gene's final diagnosis was medication and a recommendation for cardiac rehabilitation.

Recovery and Rehabilitation

Gene's provider at Saint Luke's recommended that Gene begin his rehab program at WMMC's Cardiac Rehab. Gene was impressed that Saint Luke's recommended his hometown program, but after starting rehab he understood why.



"I cannot say enough good things about Betsy and the other Rehab staff like Rachelle, Tyler and Laura," Gene stated. "They take care of people here. Betsy provides exceptional care to everyone in the program."

Surrounded by a phenomenal team and program, this 12-week recovery journey would help to reduce heart attack risk factors through lifestyle changes, providing emotional support, education and exercise.

"I just can't say enough good things about our hospital," said Gene. "Our Emergency Room experience was just great! They have come a long way over the years and doing the right things – and I would recommend the Cardiac Rehab program to everyone."

Achieving Goals Together

The last phase of Gene's recovery at Cardiac Rehab was an optional routine that would continue his journey of heart health through accountability, safety and support. Donna saw how quickly Gene was gaining strength and talked with her physician about enrolling in the program alongside her husband.

"After my first few visits, I can already see improvement in my walking and I have more energy," Donna said. "We can do this together, and we are so fortunate to have such a quality program nearby."

Gene met Donna at the skating rink, and they were married in February 1961. They have been married for 58 years and have called Warrensburg home ever since. Because of the life-saving care Gene received, they look forward to many more years together.

Signs & Risk Factors of a Heart Attack

Every 40 seconds, someone in the United States has a heart attack. If you notice the symptoms of a heart attack in yourself or someone else, **call 9-1-1 immediately.** A quick response can reduce the amount of damage to the heart muscle and potentially save a life.

The five signs of a heart attack are:

- Chest pain or discomfort
- Feeling weak, light-headed, or faint
- Pain or discomfort in the jaw, neck, or back
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms or shoulders
- Shortness of breath

The following habits are associated with a higher risk of a heart attack:



- High blood pressure/ blood cholesterol
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Lack of exercise
- Obesity or poor diet
- Excessive alcohol intake

Help us share Gene's story and raise awareness of the importance of heart attack symptoms and response!