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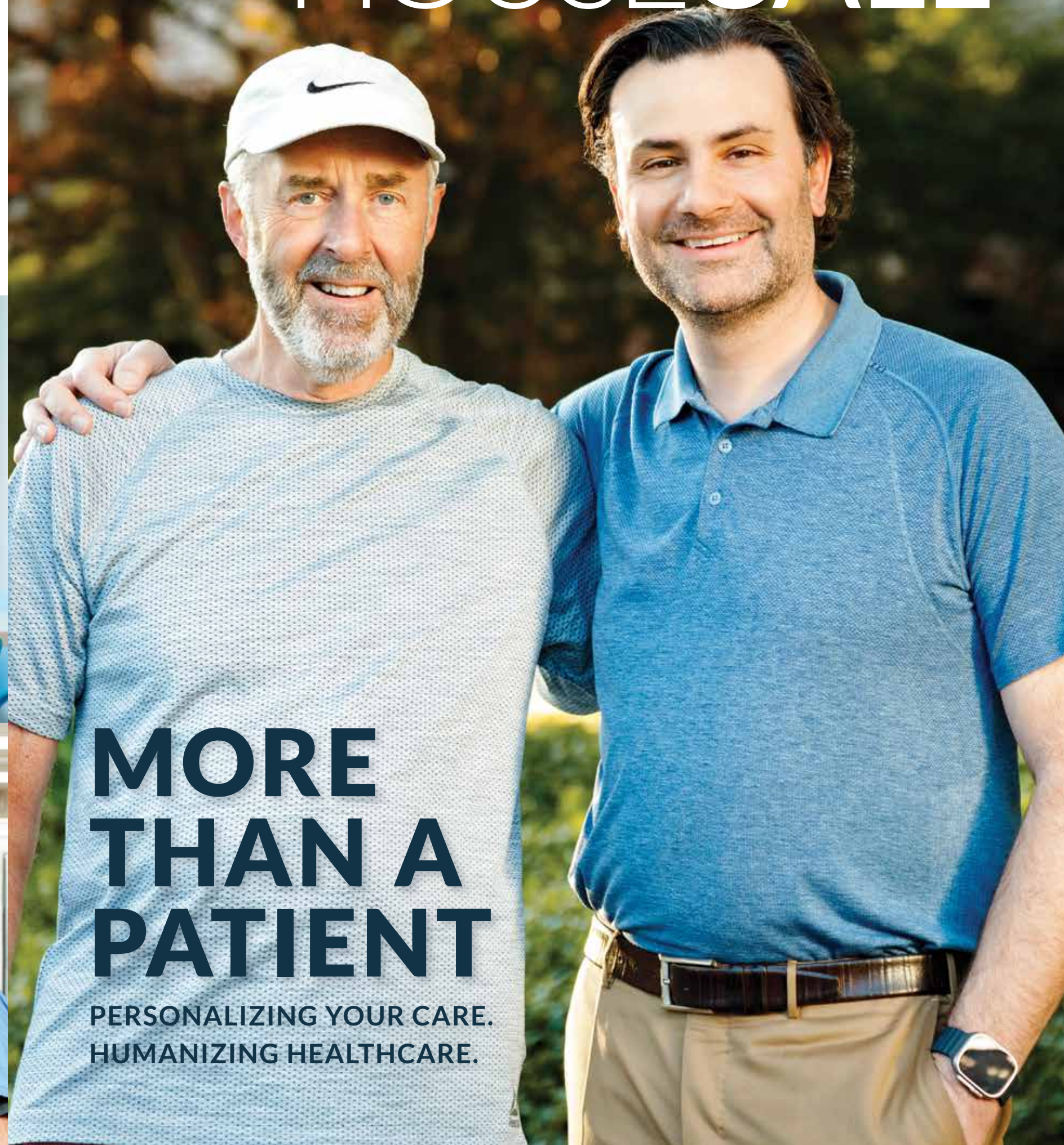


**HERE...WE MAKE
THINGS PERSONAL**



HOUSECALL

SUMMER 2023



**MORE
THAN A
PATIENT**

PERSONALIZING YOUR CARE.
HUMANIZING HEALTHCARE.



Shannon, Dormont
*Company President
Jazz Dance Team Member
Cancer Survivor*

WHERE YOU'RE MORE THAN A PATIENT



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SINCE 1954, St. Clair Health has been dedicated to quality, innovation, responsiveness to community needs, and the humanity of the physicians, nurses, and caregiving staff.



HOUSECALL

A publication of St. Clair Health

Articles in this publication are for informational purposes and are not intended to serve as medical advice. Please consult your personal physician.



We are honored to have our outstanding physicians recognized as

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Andy C. Kiser, MD, MBA, FACS, FACC, FCCP
Physician-in-Chief of Cardiovascular Services

FIRSTCALL

YOU'RE MORE THAN A PATIENT AT ST. CLAIR HEALTH

Where does the idea of tailoring your care to humanize healthcare come from? It starts with the team—not just behind the scenes, but right out in front—for every patient.

Many examples exist in my area of expertise, cardiac and thoracic surgery. Whether you're talking about transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), atrial fibrillation (AFIB), or open heart surgery, a cardiovascular navigator coordinates with specialists in the lab, our nursing staff, and your cardiovascular care team. In tandem with your doctor, a patient navigator interacts with you and your family every step of the way.

Expert care from people who care extends far beyond cardiology—it's the model that unites St. Clair Health across service lines.

Orthopedics. Urology. Breast Care. Plastics. And more. They all merge together around you to create a personalized patient experience. Over the years, many patients in these very pages have said, "At St. Clair Health, you're not a number." I believe that's because, "We've got your number"—meaning that when one doctor has a challenging case, they're coordinating care both throughout their area of expertise and across disciplines and specialties in order to get you exactly what you need.

And they're putting that effort in immediately.

We have state-of-the-art tools from diagnostics to surgery, and within each element, it's more than the technician conducting imaging studies or labs and it's more than the doctor performing a minimally invasive surgery with the da Vinci® robot on the big day—your team is integrated across St. Clair Health. That's what allows us to deliver innovative solutions, from pinpointing what's challenging you to shepherding your recovery in physical therapy and everything in between.

When neurology assesses a stroke event. When a patient presents in the Emergency Department with any number of

rapid response conditions. And of course, all throughout the pandemic. Our answer to critical care is equally intensive collaboration.

St. Clair Health is relentless in providing better options to the communities we serve, like Dunlap Family Outpatient Center and its full suite of comprehensive services that make it a one-stop shop for outpatient care. And we're at the forefront of leading the region forward with initiatives like the annual Pittsburgh Heart Team Summit, which drives team dynamics and cooperative expertise while educating health care providers about more seamless ways to work together to improve patient safety and clinical efficiency.



Everything we do is based on building our care—and your team—around your needs.

Personally, being at St. Clair is a blessing. I grew up on a tobacco farm in North Carolina, and my effort with every patient is rooted in understanding how special—how unique, really—the opportunity to deliver advanced care close to home truly is.

Our adaptability is one of our greatest assets because it powers us to gameplan around every patient who walks through our door. To change the game by looking at what's happened in your life and attacking the challenge the only way we know how—with everything we've got. In my area, that might mean breakthroughs that allow us to place a mechanical pump inside the heart that's the size of a pin. Across St. Clair Health, direct anterior hip replacement, robotic colon resection, and much more puts us at the cutting edge of care.

From clinical research to clinical trials for cancer care, it's a privilege to work alongside so many others who are leading the way, together. It's an honor to get a text from a patient on my birthday or a letter on the anniversary of their operation because it reminds me of something profound:

At St. Clair Health, we're treating you for tomorrow. ■

ANDY C. KISER, MD

Dr. Kiser specializes in cardiac and thoracic surgery. He is board-certified by the American Board of Thoracic Surgery and the American Board of Surgery. Dr. Kiser earned his medical degree with honors from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he also completed a general surgery residency, fellowships in cardiac and thoracic surgery, served as Chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, and later achieved an MBA. At East Carolina University, Dr. Kiser served as Chief of Cardiac Surgery and Director of Cardiovascular Surgical Services. He was also a Distinguished Professor at both institutions. Dr. Kiser practices with St. Clair Medical Group and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2023. **To contact Dr. Kiser, please call 412.942.5728.**

A SYSTEM OF CARE DESIGNED AROUND YOU

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT LEADERS SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE ST. CLAIR HEALTH TO TOP DECILE PATIENT SATISFACTION.

Back in 2008, St. Clair Health expanded and redesigned the Emergency Department's physical footprint to double its size, offering 46 beds to serve the community's emergent needs. **Jason M. Biggs, MD, Chair of Emergency Medicine**, joined the team in 2009.

"We built a new system of care with the patient in the center that could take full advantage of the added space," he says. "That always starts with getting the right information to everyone on the team and having everyone on the same page so they can best serve every patient who comes through that door."

Communication. Ever-evolving processes. Infrastructure and technology upgrades. St. Clair continued to streamline industry-leading emergency services for more than a decade, ranking in the 99th percentile of safety and excellence surveys from Press Ganey, the world's leading Human Experience platform for healthcare.

Then COVID tilted healthcare on its axis.

"We went from having constant contact with each other and being able to regularly train new staff in our system approach to barely being able to see each other's faces. The pandemic absolutely challenged the frontline of Emergency Medicine nationally," Biggs says. "Fortunately, I'm surrounded by passionate people at St. Clair Health who worked tirelessly to adapt."

Jeffrey R. Hodges, RN, BSN, MHS, NEA-BC, Director, Emergency Services, has more than 30 years of experience in wide-reaching trauma capacities. He joined St. Clair Health in 2021.

"One thing that made a huge difference in both navigating a global pandemic and now emerging from it: hyper-focusing on one-to-one interactions to address patient needs. From meeting with intake nurses to learning and sharing out on the floor, we are constantly working together to make sure the needs of our patients and our staff are being met," he says. "And that only serves to bring us even closer."

Proximity is a touchstone of their relationship—a connection that runs much deeper than offices across the hall from one another.



Proximity of new CT scanner saves critical time.

"I have oversight of our physicians and advanced practice providers while Jeff is in charge of the nursing, ER technicians, and other ED staff. Together we focus on the departmental goals of quality, efficiency, and patient experience. Operationally, we're co-leaders—and that's an important distinction," Biggs says. "Jeff brings a litany of experience and fresh eyes to each step of the process. The enthusiasm he brings to emergency medicine makes me better every day."

Hodges on Biggs:

"He's the most hands-on medical director I've ever worked with. Achieving success in emergency medicine means bringing a lot of different people together and never being afraid to try something new. Jason is the biggest advocate for always striving to improve everything we do."

With departmental success tethered to all of its moving parts working as one, this dynamic co-leadership duo functions as a beacon of patient-first, system-wide design. As a data-driven organization, St. Clair Health analyzes every step of a patient's journey in order to optimize their experience. It's a commitment the ED takes very seriously.

"We don't want you waiting one minute longer than absolutely necessary. That's why we focus so hard on the elements that can cut wait time down, from global process improvements to working with the inpatient team and many others across St. Clair Health," Biggs says. "The entire organization works hand in hand."

That thinking is driven by patient-centric efforts at every step—from getting patients into a room and in front of a physician as quickly as possible to ensuring safety protocols are adhered to with the same attention to detail.

"When patients are able to move through the process more efficiently, we're able to deliver more effective care. It's better for everyone," Biggs says. "If we average 150 patients each day and shorten their wait time by 10 minutes, that's 1500 virtual minutes we can use to deliver additional emergent care to the community."

The math of the equation is undisputed. The people math driving the relentless improvement is something Hodges has personally experienced out on the floor with the Emergency Department staff.

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"In order to get my feet under me as a leader at St. Clair, I spent a lot of time working side by side with my nursing staff on the unit. That's how you see what's working and identify where the opportunities are—you have to *feel* the culture. And I continue to be amazed by the expertise of the clinicians here," he says. "It's a tremendous benefit for patients when we effectively combine everyone's skills. The collaboration Jason speaks to exists at all levels—teaching, coaching, and developing this team."

Hodges sees the precision from unit secretaries fast-tracking patient admittance to nurses discharging patients and coaching them up on the best technique for using their crutches after they leave.

"Every single patient matters—and in our world, you never know what type of condition a patient may be coming in with. What might be routine for us could be the worst thing that's ever happened to them. That's where mindfulness, empathy, and awareness really come into play. Our goal is to treat you like family, so when you come to St. Clair Health, you're not a number. We want you to think, 'I must be the only person here,' because you received such great attention and care," he says.

Another prime example of the Emergency Department's continued enhancement is the recent redesign of stroke alert capabilities, including the proximity of computerized tomography (CT) scans. Stroke alert is the process undertaken when a patient presents stroke symptoms via Emergency Medical Services (EMS) or within the unit.

"The new CT scanner is literally 20 feet from the front door. We're able to do a quick assessment in conjunction with our telestroke services from Mayo Clinic, rapid labs, and more—all with the goal of saving critical time," Biggs says. "CT is known as 'the donut of truth' in emergency medicine, and when you're racing against the clock, every minute saved helps mitigate risk factors associated with the prospective diagnosis."

With a watchful eye on parallel processes, the care team will also now meet stroke patients right at the door. A big part of that is the co-education opportunity with EMS.

"We value the whole team, and EMS plays a vital role in that. We want them to tell us what

they're seeing as it's happening—especially if something's changed in the time since the alert was called in. When that ambulance arrives, it's never a, 'We'll take it from here,' kind of thing," Hodges says.

"Providing updates and feedback to our EMS partners is crucial. We want them to know that when every moment matters, they can rely on us," Biggs adds.

When serious, unexpected, and even dangerous situations require immediate action, the emergency department at St. Clair Health rises to the crisis, just as Biggs and Hodges have throughout their careers.

"I started as a unit secretary and became a nursing assistant while I was going to school. Then I became a nurse—I worked my way up through the ranks, became a manager, and then a nursing executive. But I missed the ER—it's the closest thing I've ever experienced to playing and coaching team sports and there's just nothing quite like it," Hodges says.

Ever the one to push the progression, Biggs finishes the thought.

"Emergency medicine is one of the most challenging aspects of healthcare to perfect. It's imperative that you show up every day ready for anything, and that's an intensely demanding

"When patients are able to move through the process more efficiently, we're able to deliver more effective care. It's better for everyone."

JASON M. BIGGS, MD
Chair of Emergency Medicine

experience. That's what makes it so rewarding at the same time," Biggs says. "It's the best job in the world and the only one for me—the definition of an always-on mentality, staying ready and being available 24/7. We take great pride in the safety and expertise we provide any time, day or night." ■



JASON M. BIGGS, MD

Dr. Biggs serves as Chair of Emergency Medicine at St. Clair Health and is board-certified by the American Board of Emergency Medicine. He earned his medical degree at Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, and completed a residency in emergency medicine at UPMC.



JEFFREY R. HODGES, RN, BSN, MHS, NEA-BC

Mr. Hodges serves as Director of Emergency Services at St. Clair Health and is certified as an Advanced Nursing Executive by the American Nurses Credentialing Center. He completed the Registered Nurse Diploma Program at Shadyside Hospital School of Nursing, earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Ohio University, Athens, and a Master of Health Science from Chatham University.



EMERGENCY CARE DEPTH & PERSPECTIVE

**A FUTURE PHYSICIAN'S LETTER OF THANKS TO THOSE WHO DELIVERED EXPERT
EMERGENCY CARE PROPELS DEEPER DIVE INTO HEALTH CARE DONE WELL.**

Tabitha Banks-Tibbs, a 29-year-old physician-scientist in training from Lilburn, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta, matriculated first to Clemson University where she completed undergraduate studies in biological sciences and competed as a springboard diver after a record-setting career at Parkview High School where she was named Most Valuable Diver (MVD) four times—twice winning Gwinnett County MVD in addition to being named to the All-State team.

She achieved that success while overcoming a decades-long struggle as a rare disease patient and battling through both polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis. Tabitha set her goals even bigger after graduation, and moved to Pittsburgh in the Fall of 2019 after completing the first part of her medical training at The Ohio State University College of Medicine.

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“My route to the PhD program in Human Genetics at the University of Pittsburgh has been non-traditional. When I started medical school, I knew I wanted to do research as well, so I decided to complete a research year—one research year turned into two research years, and then two research years became a PhD, changing my path from an MD to an MD/PhD,” she says. “It’s a little uncommon, but much of my life has been, too.”

For Tabitha, one familiar piece of fact-finding in her new home was figuring out where to go when an emergent health care situation inevitably arose.

“In a city like this with so many hospitals, I knew I needed to have a plan. In addition to my health challenges, my husband is somewhat notorious for falling off his mountain bike. All kidding aside, it’s something we take very seriously—and just about everybody I talked to said, ‘I’d go to St. Clair,’” she says.

In July of 2021, Tabitha’s plan was first put to the test.

“I woke up at 3AM to what I thought was the usual PCOS pain that I had felt every four to six weeks for the past 15 years—so I grabbed a heat pack and went back to bed,” she says. “At 6AM, I woke again in excruciating right-lower quadrant pain, was unable to stand up straight, and every step I attempted to take sent shooting pains down my right leg,” she says. “My husband drove me to the ER at St. Clair, and from the moment I walked through the door, I was treated with the utmost care and respect.”

Tabitha’s first standout moments actually came from sitting down.

“A member of the intake staff immediately recognized how much trouble I was having and rushed to grab a wheelchair. I was feverish and alternating between feeling like I was burning up and freezing cold. The nurses brought warm blankets every time they came to check on me to help with my uncontrollable shivers, and when I was admitted—crying out in pain—they brought extra pillows to help prop me up in the least excruciating position possible,” she says.

Next, **Celeste Rovito, PA-C**, assessed Tabitha to identify the potential cause of her pain and Tabitha was taken for a CT scan.

“The radiology staff took great care to take the pressure off of my abdomen throughout, since rolling onto my back and trying to uncurl my body had me physically shaking,” she says. “Not only did they manage to rule out appendicitis, but instead of marking me as a hypochondriac, they astutely noticed large cysts on both of my ovaries.”

As Tabitha’s case unfolded, an ultrasound was performed to check for ovarian torsion.

“St. Clair has the most patient people I’ve ever met. The ultrasound tech had the extremely difficult task of pressing a wand into my painful abdomen. She was able to get me to relax enough to conduct the ultrasound, calmly talking me through everything and letting me repeatedly roll to my left side—the only position that seemed to ease the torrent of pain—giving me an extra pillow, and guiding me through breathing exercises. To say she was an angel is an understatement.”



"Getting the job done is one thing. Going above and beyond the call of duty is another. At St. Clair Health, each and every person I encountered really listened and treated me as a person—that's health care done well."

TABITHA BANKS-TIBBS
Patient

Following the confirmation of ovarian torsion, **Amy B. Turner, DO**, who practices with Advanced Women’s Care of Pittsburgh, was assigned to Tabitha’s case.

“Dr. Turner is, by far, one of the most adept physicians I have ever met in my life. She quickly put my worried husband at ease, and worked diligently to minimize my time waiting. Not only did she listen to our concerns, she listened to my request to remove my problematic right (torsed) ovary, after educating me on what that decision would mean,” she says.

As Tabitha was taken to pre-op, a guilty thought that had nothing to do with her condition emerged.

“I remember profusely apologizing to everyone for interrupting their weekend! And the anesthesiologist instantly assured me that I had nothing for which I needed to apologize.”

AMY B. TURNER, DO

Dr. Turner specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She earned her medical degree from Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed obstetrics and gynecology residency at AHN West Penn Hospital. Dr. Turner practices with Advanced Women’s Care of Pittsburgh and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2023. **To contact Dr. Turner, please call 724.941.1866.**

In the operating room, a nurse noticed that Tabitha’s hair bun prohibited her head from laying flat, and instructed Tabitha to let her hair down.

“For someone to be that observant—to take one look at me and that’s the first thing they think, ‘This person could be more comfortable if she took her hair down’—that’s a true wow moment. It took me awhile to figure it out because my hair was the last place my thoughts went. But when we got home and my husband was helping me into bed, I thought, ‘I probably need to brush my hair.’ When I reached up and realized my hair was braided, I looked at my husband and asked if he braided my hair. His response was, ‘Do you remember the last time I tried to braid your hair?’ with a laugh. And then it clicked: the same nurse who told me to let my hair down so I would be more comfortable really went out of her way to braid my hair back, too,” she says. “I’m not someone who cries at much, but that level of kindness brought tears of joy to my eyes—to know that somebody would care enough about me to do something like that.”

Tabitha was equally adamant about another element of her post-op care.

“I have been a rare disease patient for almost 20 years, and I have multiple food allergies, too. The attention to detail to figure out the right food for me and communicate with the cafeteria staff to make sure I had a good meal before being discharged speaks volumes about the extra effort of everyone at St. Clair,” she says.

Because of the exceptional care she received in 2021, Tabitha again chose St. Clair Health’s Emergency Department when she accidentally walked into her fold-down linen cabinet door without her glasses on late one night in January of 2023. This time, **Caitlin Klajnowski, PA-C**, answered the call.

“Not only was she kind, but she did a wonderful job inspecting my face to ensure—before she began stitching—that she was doing everything she could to minimize scarring,” Tabitha says.

In the spirit of absolute clarity, she spares nothing when it comes to her ongoing gratitude and appreciation for the emergency care teams at St. Clair Health.

“I’ve always hated going to the ER, beyond what I can put into words. I was diagnosed at a young age with an extremely rare electrolyte disorder that caused me to develop a very unhealthy fear of being an ER patient,” she says.

In delivering a million kudos to the care she received via a letter of commendation to the staff, Tabitha was gracious enough to speak further about her lifelong patient perspective for this article. Ultimately, she compared it to the difference between health care done right...and health care done well.

“Getting the job done is one thing. Going above and beyond the call of duty is another. At St. Clair Health, each and every person I encountered really listened and treated me as a person—that’s health care done well,” she says. “Why is that important? Because for the first time in my life, I feel comfortable in the knowledge that should another emergency arise, I will be safely taken care of.” ■



Tabitha’s tears of joy turned into a million kudos for the St. Clair ER.



MORE THAN MILES

Direct anterior approach (DAA) to total hip replacement sets the pace for one patient’s trip around the world.

Walking from Munhall, where Bob Bodnar grew up, to Scott Township, where he now lives, covers just over half of a full marathon. Google Maps tells you that charting that course would take almost five hours out of your day. Upon being told this, Bob laughs. “I was never a fast runner, just a determined one. I was never concerned with my place in a race or my finishing time. My best marathon was 4 hours and 51 minutes—but I never stopped. My goal was always to finish.”

Starting in 1990, Bodnar was a runner. He caught the fitness bug following his divorce, seeking to channel his energy into something positive. After five years of lifting weights and dabbling in a 5k here and a 10k there, Bodnar knew there was more he could do.

“The more I got into it, the more guilty I felt because here I was putting in all this effort...and then I was smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. The reason I started really tracking my miles was because on July 1, 1995, I decided to quit being a walking contradiction—I quit smoking cold turkey. It wasn’t a 40th birthday thing, that was just a coincidence. I had seen all the health problems my dad had over the years and knew I had to do it.”

On November 9, 1995, Bodnar’s father died.

“That solidified my position to kick it up a notch, because there’s no time like the present. I was determined to go from a pack-a-day smoker to running a marathon.”

As Bodnar kept logging his miles, he tapped into another coincidence for added motivation while chasing the kind of training that could help him build up to complete a 26.2-mile marathon course.

“I didn’t start out to do it like Forrest Gump, but that’s my favorite movie of all time and it just kind of happened that way. I ‘ran across the country’ one loop around the neighborhood at a time. And then I did it again, comparing my mileage to him. That’s when I started thinking bigger, ‘What about going around the world at the equator?’ I looked it up on Google and found my new goal: 24,901 miles.”

In October of 1997, Bodnar went the distance at the Marine Corps Marathon (MCM) in Washington, DC. Known

as “the best marathon for beginners,” the MCM is also the largest marathon in the world that doesn’t offer prize money.

“That’s why they call it, ‘The People’s Marathon,’ and it really checked all the boxes. It’s within driving distance, so the family could make a little trip of it. It’s a very scenic place where you take a loop around The Pentagon and get to see all of the great landmarks while you’re running. And my dad was a Marine—another wonderful coincidence. That wasn’t what motivated me necessarily, but I do wish he was alive to know that I’ve done that.”

Bodnar wanted to make sure crossing that first finish line wasn’t a fluke. He ran the MCM again in 1998, 1999—when he also completed the Pittsburgh Marathon, navigating 26.2 miles twice in six months—and 2001. For more than 15 years he remained active and healthy, but struggled to get beyond 10 or 11 miles as severe tendinitis forced him out of organized races.

“I switched to fast walking in 2018 to keep grinding toward my goal of going around the world at the equator. But in 2020, a hip X-ray confirmed that I was bone on bone. I tried a conservative approach at first, getting a steroid injection, but after a couple of weeks I was back to hurting again. From January of 2021 through January of 2023, I tried to grit through it but I was down from walking 20 miles a week to 10 miles on a really good week. When the pain forced me into struggling with single digits, and the hip pain started causing knee pain as well, I knew I had to take a more aggressive approach to healing.”

Running into **Brett C. Perricelli, MD, FAAOS, Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery** at St. Clair Health, was no coincidence. “I lost count of all the runners and walkers around the neighborhood who said he’s just the best,” Bodnar says.

“It’s one of the most powerful things about the communities we serve,” Dr. Perricelli says. “When your team takes great care of people, they point others in need in the right direction—and more often than you might think, that leads them right to my front yard! I was out pulling weeds, blowing leaves, and I see Bob walking his

“I started thinking bigger, ‘What about going around the world at the equator?’ I looked it up on Google and found my new goal: 24,901 miles.”

BOB BODNAR
Patient

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Dr. Perricelli uses the specialized Hana® table to dial in a perfect fit.

laps waving at me. He tells me he's got a bad hip and I asked him if he wanted to slow down. 'No way—I've got 5,000 more miles to go!' he said. That's when he told me about his goal."

Understanding a patient's goals is the first key to unlocking the best treatment plan on a case-by-case basis.

"Especially when you're already active, or have a history of heightened activity, that's the first thing I want to understand—because you're going to have options before surgery. Bob had been through all of that, so we focused on what he wasn't able to do because of the pain he was having. Once we know the goal, we then figure out how to get you exactly where you want to be. For some patients it is going to a grandchild's activity, for others it is extending a work career. For Bob, it was to hit a walking/running goal," Dr. Perricelli says.

Total hip replacement surgery can be done three ways: from the back (posterior), the side (lateral), and the front (anterior). For Dr. Perricelli, the direct anterior approach is the best option.

"I have done thousands of hip replacements from the posterior approach. In my opinion,

the direct anterior approach has more benefits compared to other approaches," he says.

Dr. Perricelli on those benefits:

"The DA approach is a less invasive surgery to replace the damaged hip that doesn't cut through any of the nearby muscles, tendons, or bone attachments to the proximal femur (top part of the thigh bone). The surgical plane (approach) goes right between two muscles—the rectus and the tensor fascia lata—instead of going through them. That's going to give you a quicker recovery time, less pain, and a lower rate of dislocation."



BRETT C. PERRICELLI, MD, FAAOS

Dr. Perricelli is Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery at St. Clair Health and is board-certified by the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery. He earned his medical degree at the University of Pittsburgh and completed residencies in general surgery and orthopaedic surgery at UPMC. Dr. Perricelli then completed an Adult Reconstruction fellowship at OrthoCarolina Hip & Knee Center, Charlotte, NC. He practices with South Hills Orthopaedic Surgery Associates and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2023.

To contact Dr. Perricelli, please call 412.283.0260.

But Dr. Perricelli also notes that, "It still takes time to heal, you can't speed up Mother Nature!"

There are challenges associated with the approach: it's more technically demanding on the surgeon, has a different set of potential complications, and requires specialized equipment, instrumentation, and training. To stay at the cutting edge of care, St. Clair has invested in a surgical table specifically designed for use in anterior hip replacement procedures, the Hana® table.

"On the specialized table I can use intra-operative X-ray to determine the best fit and orientation of each implant, accounting for all of the different measurements we look at in real time. I'm able to dial in exactly what the patient needs during surgery," Dr. Perricelli says.

It also allows the surgeon to be able to adapt to augmented reality and artificial intelligence, as those tools are rapidly evolving in orthopedics.

Bodnar remains effusive in his praise of Dr. Perricelli's acute attention to detail in outlining the benefits of his preferred procedure.

"I'm one of those people where, if I'm going to buy a toaster, then I do a ton of research. I read all the reviews and make my gameplan—so with major surgery, you better believe I'm going to look into it. Brett takes a very analytical approach and he answered every question I brought to the table," Bodnar says. "And he's also extremely personable—he called me the day before my surgery to make sure I was totally comfortable. With Brett, I felt like I had a friend doing my operation."

Fostering a deep connection with the community is a privilege Dr. Perricelli takes personally.

"Talking to patients the night before surgery is important to me—people are nervous, so I focus on reiterating the plan and putting them at ease. Ironically, the most common question I get is, 'Are you going to get a good night's sleep?' What I get to do is so rewarding because it really is a two-way street."

Far beyond calming any last-minute nerves ahead of joint replacement surgery, Dr. Perricelli is adamant that at St. Clair Health, the all-in approach is a total team effort.

"Teamwork is the biggest thing—and it's a big team that surrounds each patient's overall care. We train together, we learn together, and we grow our expertise together. I trained on the direct anterior approach in fellowship and have now converted my practice from a posterior approach to the DA approach for those patients who are candidates for it. It is critically important that every member of your care team is up to speed. From coordinating with our office through your surgery and post-operative care, everything we do from translational research review to attending and lecturing at conferences across the country is geared to function as one team operating around you."

Another big part of Bob Bodnar's care team is **Lauren Bodnar Craig, RN, BSN**, a proud Collier Township resident and St. Clair Health nurse whose son was born at St. Clair. She's also Bob's daughter.

"Lauren encouraged me to get my hip replaced for a long time," he says. "I was stubborn and kept trying to push through the pain, and she kept reminding me, 'You don't have to wait to start living again.' She was right, with doctors like Brett, you don't."

"Watching my dad go from someone who ran marathons to having trouble getting around was really tough. It was gradual until it wasn't—and that hit like a ton of bricks," Lauren says.

"He was back out there six weeks after surgery and it's like he's back to being himself. And now we're back to spending time together without the moment being overtaken by him being in pain anymore."

Direct anterior hip replacement helped Bob Bodnar catch the fitness bug again.

"I'm out walking 20-to-24 miles a week, putting me on pace for 1,000 miles a year. It's such a great stress reliever, and because of Brett, I've got that back. The endorphins are flowing and I feel good. I love the outdoors, just taking it outside to walk the Panhandle Trail. I've got 3,365 miles to go and my goal is to walk around the world the year I turn 70."

At St. Clair Health, orthopedic patients like Bob Bodnar have access to the MyMobility® app that can link to your preferred smart device allowing your care team to track your progress before and after surgery and communicate with secure messaging.

"I love it because it's another example of how we're using technology to help you through the whole process and come out better on the other side. We can log in at any time and review your messages and get back to you faster," Dr. Perricelli says.

Bob Bodnar's life has been a remarkable concurrence of events. Some might call it fate or luck and others serendipity.

"Brett's taken care of the whole neighborhood! Expert care from people who care...that's no coincidence," he says. ■



"It's one of the most powerful things about the communities we serve. When your team takes great care of people, they point others in need in the right direction—and more often than you might think, that leads them right to my front yard!"

BRETT C. PERRICELLI, MD, FAAOS
Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery

DRIVEN TO COMPETE FOR THE COMMUNITY

One surgeon's complete faith in another shoulders a full swing at retirement.

Growing up in Mt. Lebanon and starring in both football and lacrosse, **James R. Mullen, MD, St. Clair Medical Group—Orthopedic Surgery**, learned a thing or two about playing through pain.

"Two broken thumbs. I broke one collarbone and dislocated the other. A pair of torn hamstrings. Severe high ankle sprain. A shoulder dislocation requiring surgery. And I even broke my nose playing basketball recreationally," he says. "But what I do isn't just about sports—it's for anyone who feels like whatever they're battling through is something they just have to deal with," he says.

The two-time high school All-America selection and member of the 2005 US Lacrosse Senior Showcase Championship team—as the only representative from Western Pennsylvania—played both sports at the Division I level, garnering multiple All-Conference awards as well as Team MVP while attending Dartmouth College before "going pro" in orthopedic surgery.

"The path I chose really chose me because musculoskeletal injuries are things that everyone can understand—you literally feel it in your bones. What's always impacted me is how those injuries affect the rest of your life, because your spouse, your children, your co-workers, they're just like your teammates and you don't want to let them down," he says. "My background as a Division I athlete helps me relate to whatever you're going through, as I have experienced a lot of the same injuries and/or simple wear-and-tear issues first hand. I then combine my personal and professional experience along with your specific goals, wants, and needs to formulate a customized gameplan to make your pain, stiffness, or immobility less of a burden for you and the people you love. Just like a teammate, they're the ones who have to pick up the slack when you're hurting, and I've been through that."

Before joining St. Clair Health in 2022, Mullen worked with Dr. William C. Hagberg—who also specialized in treatment of shoulder, hand, and elbow—at a Wexford-based orthopedic private practice.

"Early on it was easy to see that Jimmy was a very gifted surgeon. His talent with arthroscopic elbow and shoulder procedures—and also with joint replacement and arthroplasty—was quite evident. I had complete confidence referring my own patients to him," Hagberg says.

In similar fashion to Mullen, who played through the myriad sports injuries listed above in pursuit of his Division I goal, Hagberg embraced the grind that is often all too easy to simply associate with everyday life.

"I had arthritis in my shoulder for...seven to ten years. It was bothersome, but it was something I could work through. Progressively it got worse, and I didn't want to undergo a replacement procedure because I thought it would take me out of work for too long," Hagberg says.

Thriving in private practice for more than 30 years while also teaching orthopedic fellows across the region, Hagberg built up an extensive network of surgical knowledge and trust throughout the city. Upon retirement last year, he started coming to terms with the quality of the rest of his life.

"I had a lot of things to do! My son was getting married. My daughter had just welcomed another baby into the fold. And a really good friend of ours was getting married in Australia. I still didn't want to jump right into a major surgery...but it was getting harder and harder to not admit how much the stiffness and the pain was affecting pretty much everything," he says.

For many, shoulder arthritis causes so much pain that they can't sleep. For Hagberg, it wasn't constant debilitating pain, but rather acute pain at the extremes of motion, where the end point of reaching for something crunched enough to bring the moment to a standstill.

Continued on Page 18

ORTHOPEDICS



"The biggest thing in making the decision was being able to put my complete trust in another surgeon's hands. I knew from the moment I made up my mind that Jimmy was that guy."

DR. WILLIAM C. HAGBERG
Patient

“My wife deserves a ton of credit here. She’s a retired OB/GYN and she helped me see that I was forcing myself to live within limits that didn’t need to exist,” he says. “The pain wasn’t keeping me up at night, but there were many points throughout any given day where I was sort of bracing for impact.”

What Dr. Margie C. Hagberg saw was her husband struggling through and even actively avoiding the very things he had long looked forward to in retirement.

“Getting down on the ground to play blocks with the grandkids meant that I had to think about how I was going to push off to get up. And I had completely stopped playing golf—I wanted to take Margie to get lessons so we could play together and that just wasn’t possible,” he says.

The time had come to take action. And the choice of surgeon was clear.

“I knew Dr. Mullen’s talent from scrubbing in with him—I was very comfortable. Look, I’m a surgeon, so I knew the potential procedures, the literature associated with their outcomes, and the indications of my condition. The biggest thing in making the decision was being able to put my complete trust in another surgeon’s hands. I knew from the moment I made up my mind that Jimmy was that guy.”

Dr. Mullen’s plan called for a reverse

shoulder replacement versus the standard anatomical option. With the latter, surgeons replace the shoulder ball and socket with a prosthetic ball and socket. The more advanced reverse shoulder replacement is exactly what it sounds like—the ball is placed on the socket side of the joint and the socket is then placed on the arm side, with a metal stem in the arm bone (humerus) supporting it. “It has become more prevalent in the last 15 years, and his experience with the procedure was even greater than mine. When Jimmy laid it out for me, I knew he was right,” Hagberg says.

“Going with a reverse shoulder replacement is better for a patient with the degree of Bill’s bone loss and deformity because the change in position of the joint removes the grinding and crunching and pain associated with arthritis,” Mullen says. “Especially if you have a large rotator cuff tear—this prosthesis is going to function extremely well for you over an extended period of time.”

With advanced imaging and 3D computer-navigated technology, St. Clair Health orthopedic surgeons are able to model a patient’s joint replacement procedure prior to actually performing it.

“Operating on another orthopedic surgeon is unique—and Bill obviously comes to the

table with his extensive experience in the surgical theater, specializing in the exact same subspecialty within orthopedics as myself. One of the elements that’s really cool for any patient is being able to take this complicated operation and create 3D models of their anatomy, which allows for a customized surgical plan tailored to the shape and orientation of their bones,” Dr. Mullen says. “The 3D surgical modeling gives both myself and the patient precise visualization of exactly what we’re going to do prior to the surgery, with the ultimate goal of maximizing function and minimizing pain.”

Time and timing were of equal importance to Dr. Mullen.

“Bill is a very active guy—and as much as he wanted to get back out on the golf course, he has five grandkids under age five. Expert care from people who care means that at St. Clair Health, we build a specific and customized plan around the way you want to live your life,” he says.

Dunlap Family Outpatient Center was designed with exacting intent to make every step of a patient’s health care journey as seamless as possible.

“As impressed as I am with Jimmy, I’m just as impressed with St. Clair’s new facility. All my preoperative testing, bloodwork, EKG, and CT



Dr. Mullen details the customized surgical plan.

“The 3D surgical modeling gives both myself and the patient precise visualization of exactly what we’re going to do prior to the surgery, with the ultimate goal of maximizing function and minimizing pain.”

JAMES R. MULLEN, MD
St. Clair Medical Group—Orthopedic Surgery



scan took place right there in the same building,” Hagberg says. “I was expecting everything to take at least a whole day—maybe even multiple days—but my appointment was at two o’clock in the afternoon and I was headed home by four, all set for my surgery.”

Another benefit of outpatient shoulder replacement surgery at St. Clair Health: Hagberg returned to the comfort of his own home the very same day his procedure took place.

“I had no pain at all—and I slept well the very first night,” he says. “As a surgeon, I helped many patients get back to where they wanted to be. But there was still some trepidation, because this time it was me having the surgery. I couldn’t be more amazed at how quick and pain-free the recovery process has been—I was out there chipping around the golf course after just 12 weeks and was able to raise my arm higher than it has gone in 10 years, at just 6 weeks from surgery.”

Dr. Mullen’s surgical expertise has extended to professional athletes—a rarified air in his specialty. A driving force of coming home was knowing that he’d be presented with opportunities to take care of people he’d known his whole life—even a former orthopedic partner.

“Functionally, we’re talking about taking a patient who couldn’t raise their arm above 50 degrees without excruciating pain before surgery and giving them full range of motion after surgery. Fundamentally, I’m not only taking care of the patient, but also their friends and family, as musculoskeletal pain and dysfunction affects everyone the patient regularly spends time with. There’s extra motivation built into these meaningful relationships with patients I know from previous life experiences. It’s something I feel every day at St. Clair,” he says.

Like getting the Dr. Hagbergs back to being Bill and Margie again.

“Retirement is everything I thought it could be. I think about it kind of like an athlete—and maybe that’s Jimmy rubbing off on me—I wanted to go out on top where I was still doing an excellent job for my patients,” Hagberg says. “Now, because of him, I get to ‘compete’ at my personal best for my family.” ■



State-of-the-art Dunlap Family Outpatient Center provides comprehensive, one-stop outpatient services.



JAMES R. MULLEN, MD
Dr. Mullen specializes in orthopaedic surgery of the shoulder, hand, and arm in both adults and children. He is board-certified by the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery and the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery—Division of Hand and Arm Surgery. Dr. Mullen earned his medical degree at Temple University School of Medicine. He completed a residency in orthopaedic surgery at Hofstra University—Northwell Health System, where he served as Administrative Chief Resident, and a fellowship in hand, arm, shoulder, and microvascular surgery at New York University Medical Center. He practices with St. Clair Medical Group.
To contact Dr. Mullen, please call 412.942.7262.

UNEASY STREET NO MORE

One patient's road to recovery is paved by the whole family—and one doctor's relentless pursuit of treating patients like her own.

Idyllic. Extremely happy. Peaceful. Picturesque. For lifelong area resident Barbara Bee, 64, of South Fayette, that's how her journey began.

"I grew up in Sturgeon, worked in accounting, fell in love, married, and we started a family. We were blessed enough that I could be a stay-at-home mom with our two boys. It was a wonderful time...the best," she says.

Barb volunteered at the library. The family went fishing. And the boys grew up. Everything seemed just about perfect—on the outside.

"In 1994, I started noticing things—I remember telling my husband, John, that I could smell leather from purses when we were out shopping," she says.

"Little things that we really didn't know exactly what to make of started popping up," he adds. "We'd go shopping and she'd tell me she felt a little light-headed or dizzy, but she'd just write it off to the smells of the store's cleaning supplies."

Slowly, and, subconsciously, Barb began to withdraw.

"I just started avoiding things more and more over the years," she says.

John, the handyman known for being as adept at changing the transmission in the family car as buttering his wife's toast, delivered a much more functional assessment.

"When I think back on it, it's like when you get a new set of tires. You just start cruising away, putting the miles on—you never really

look at the tire. And then one day it explodes because it went bald, but you never noticed the tread slowly wearing away," he says.

In 1999, the Bees suffered a series of blowouts.

"She started having panic attacks, trouble breathing, and just feeling like her heart was racing," John says.

"You end up in the ER wondering what the heck's wrong," Barb adds. "That's when we found out I suffer from severe anxiety."

Like her boys growing up and moving on with their lives, a pair of doctors Barb had found marginal levels of success with moved away as well—one to an appointment with a Veterans Affairs office and another all the way across the country.

"For 20 years we were a really lucky family living a normal life," Barb says. "But that's some 'luck,' right?"

"We've always maintained a positive outlook and shared a good sense of humor through everything," John adds. "But at the time, some part of it felt like the joke was on us."

No kidding around: Barb's anxiety—her feelings of worry, nervousness, and unease that contributed to panic attacks—had escalated. Her anxiety was now paired with agoraphobia—an extreme fear of entering open or crowded spaces, or being in places where leaving is difficult. In the ensuing years, leaving the comfort and safety of her own

home would prove more and more difficult. What began with simply avoiding regular, day-to-day activities and triggers now included putting off even routine medical care—often for long stretches.

"That's why it's so important for me to get this message out. I wasn't having panic attacks while I was trying to nurse my babies—but I know others might not be so fortunate," Barb says. "Everything was so good for so long—and I'm so happy about that. But wherever you are in life, there's always another wonderful thing around the corner that these conditions can make you miss out on."

"When our kids were young, they weren't wondering, 'What's wrong with mommy?' They were adults. Being able to address the anxiety and everything that comes with it has allowed her to be able to enjoy their lives more now while getting the regular care she needs—and that never would have been possible if we hadn't gotten diagnosed," John adds.

Together, the Bees credit **Denise D. Wegrzynowicz, DO**, who joined St. Clair Medical Group in January of 2023.

"I knew straight away that, based on her history, overcoming the fear of even leaving the house was a big first step," Wegrzynowicz says. "In addition to anxiety, Barb had hidradenitis suppurativa (HS)—an inflammatory skin condition—and high blood pressure. So from the very beginning, the goal was to find a comfortable balance between how we

would address and treat those chronic conditions that could add even more stress and anxiety to her life."

The spirit of creating a united front from Day 1 was key to the Bees.

"My experience to that point was one of being talked at. Denise talked *with* us—she works *with* me. We built it up slowly because her whole thing is, 'Together we are treating you.' That created a totally different feeling," Barb says.

"Denise really worked hard to understand Barb," John adds. "And a big part of that was open and honest communication."

Applying the intersection of her personal life and clinical expertise is a critical element of building relationships for Dr. Wegrzynowicz.

"First and foremost, I'm focused on where people are in their health care journey. Education is a big factor, and it's not about talking over someone's head. People are people. It's part kindness, part compassion, and part respecting boundaries," she says. "At the same time, I find that when I share personal things...I can't believe how many patients come back and ask about them. In Barb's case, I can say, 'You are not alone,' and share anxiety-related challenges I've experienced with my own children to show her that while I'm not necessarily in her shoes, we absolutely have a shared perspective."

As their relationship strengthened over the years, Dr. Wegrzynowicz guided Barb through her chronic conditions while expanding her comfort level regarding other forms of preventative care, like annual mammograms, she had previously eschewed. More recently, as Barb's kidney function was monitored in conjunction with her total care plan, Dr. Wegrzynowicz worked hand-in-hand with her long-known colleague, **Matthew G. Pesacreta, MD, Chief of Nephrology** at St. Clair Health, to shepherd Barb into dialysis.

And the Bees were pleased because they were already intimately familiar with the St. Clair Health campus.

"It's a short drive over—and you don't have to go downtown and fight the traffic. Following Denise here worked out really nicely for us because most of Barb's major medical care was already being done at St. Clair. We consider that another blessing...of all the hospitals we could've picked, we would've picked St. Clair," John says.

He was instrumental in getting Barb back out of the house to meet new people and work the problem.

"He's my safe person," she says. "I could not have done any of this without him."

And John's work starts long before most would even think about starting their actual work day.

"Dialysis starts at 5AM, so, I get up at 3:30 to take her in—and I stay in the area in case she needs me. When Barb calls, I come running," he says. "I'm just doing what I think a husband should do," he says. "I chose her, and this is what she needs. It's been almost three years and I've missed exactly once."

John, a truck driver, has been in for the long haul the whole time. Through their work with Dr. Wegrzynowicz, Barb had been able to find new passions, like working in a paint shop and transporting rescue animals.

"Denise just has a way about her—she's so calm," Barb says. "I'm cool as a cucumber when I see her now."

"I think that just comes with really paying attention to the details of each patient's life—and I keep tabs. Maybe one patient likes to fish. Another loves baseball, teaches preschool, or goes to the beach every Summer. What's really great about the Bees is that I get to see the whole family—John and their sons are both patients, too—so there's lots of notes and stories to keep up with," Dr. Wegrzynowicz says. "To me, that's the best thing about family medicine. My training goes from pregnancy to newborn all the way

FAMILY MEDICINE

through geriatrics. It's the most special aspect of being a family physician—I get to take care of every aspect of the family."

Illustrating her bond with the Bees: when their youngest son was living in Richmond, Virginia, he refused to give Dr. Wegrzynowicz up—driving the six hours into town for his appointments.

"As much as helping me get my anxiety lower than it's ever been before and having my blood pressure well-controlled, the affect she's had on my whole family is profound," Barb says.

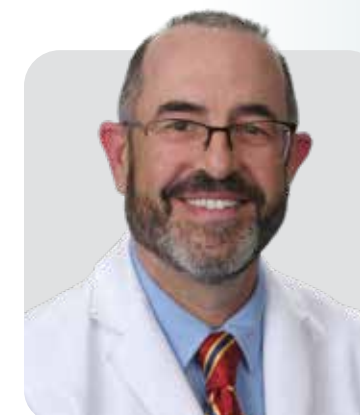
After 44 years of marriage—and three years dating before that—this is not a chapter about fearing what might happen next, but rather, continuing to grow and learn and explore based on the unique connections they've established so far.

For the Bees, their journey has always made the most sense as a love story. ■



DENISE D. WEGRZYNOWICZ, DO

Dr. Wegrzynowicz specializes in Family Medicine and is board-certified by the American Board of Family Medicine. She earned her medical degree from Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, where she also completed her internship. Dr. Wegrzynowicz completed residency in family medicine at Crozer-Chester Medical Center. She practices with St. Clair Medical Group and sees patients at Peters Township Outpatient Center. **To contact Dr. Wegrzynowicz, please call 412.942.8570.**



MATTHEW G. PESACRETA, MD

Dr. Pesacreta is Chief of Nephrology at St. Clair Health. He specializes in nephrology and is board-certified by the American Board of Nephrology. Dr. Pesacreta earned his medical degree from the University of Pittsburgh. He completed internal medicine residency at UPMC, where he also completed fellowships in geriatrics and nephrology. Dr. Pesacreta is affiliated with Teredesai, McCann and Associates and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2023. **To contact Dr. Pesacreta, please call 412.489.6919.**



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LASTCALL

CERTIFIED SURGICAL TECHNOLOGIST STANDS STRONG IN THE CURRENT

What do you do when your life's work collides with the rising tide of life? For **Kristin Berlin, Certified Surgical Technologist**, the stated goal is to shift the momentum around midlife crisis—for good.

"I want to help people that might be experiencing something like what I went through. My first career as a teacher was so fulfilling. I was able to be at school with my kids and then read to them every night, too. But they don't just stop growing up!"

As the divorced mother of two shepherded her youngest off to join his brother in the college ranks, Berlin wasn't just about to be staring at 50 candles on her next birthday cake.

"My dad had congestive heart failure which necessitated many trips to St. Clair, including a stay in the intensive care unit at St. Clair with Legionnaires' disease, a serious type of pneumonia. He was my best friend, and when he died some part of me realized I was going to be alone."

Two fascinating elements of the care provided at St. Clair stirred something inside Berlin.

"I was blown away by the teamwork—all of the cross-department collaboration. At the same time, so many of them knew my dad! He was a teacher and administrator in the Mt. Lebanon school district and it seemed like one, 'Hey, Mr. Miller!' after another. They took his care personally and he really felt that."

Every beep of a machine. Every drip of an IV. Every overhead page. Every warm blanket. And each kind conversation with a member of her dad's care team sparked a curious thought.

"I wondered, 'Could I do that?' Beyond the technical expertise, everyone so obviously loved their jobs. That's how 'could I' turned into something I knew I had to do."

When your life's work has been the family business—and the family business is education—that means you go back to school.

"My mom and her parents were also teachers and administrators, so you could say I was raised to love learning. I really looked up to my mom and wanted to be just like her. I'm a very passionate person—when I believe in something, I'm 100 percent all-in. I wanted to better myself, and not just for the sake of it. I wanted whatever came from my career change to help others. There's just something truly empowering about servant leadership."

Berlin, who grew up in Mt. Lebanon, enrolled at Pittsburgh Technical College where she earned an Associate of Science Degree in Surgical Technology. Through the School of Healthcare, Berlin received the Richard S. Caliguiri Award in honor of her academic achievements, personal achievements, and perseverance.

"School was so *hard*—and it was *so* worth it. Training to work in the operating room (OR) felt like it woke up a new part of my brain. From the ins and outs of air pressure, humidity, and anesthesia to something as granular as why the cabinets are recessed to create the most sterile environment possible. Every little thing is everything for each patient that comes through that door."

In 2018, a familiar one opened as Berlin placed at St. Clair.

"I don't believe in coincidences. This is something that was meant to be for me, and, now I'm walking down those same hallways with a complete sense of purpose because I feel like my dad is so proud of me."

For Berlin, the connection is profound.

"He doesn't know anything about this journey I'm on, but I'm here because of him. I always feel like a little piece of my dad is still with me whenever I'm on campus."

The added bonus is extensive—carried across her new extended family.

"That's really what it's like—they've become some of the best friends I've ever had. I've never been in an environment that's so team-focused. We really care about each other, and that's extremely important to me. There isn't a week that goes by where someone doesn't tell me they're so happy I'm working that particular day, and I feel the exact same way about them."

At St. Clair Health, Berlin's passion for pushing her personal progression unites with compassionate care for patients every time she's in the OR. From setup through surgery, every segment of her journey serves as an instrument of success.

"Time stands still when you're holding the hand of someone who's maybe scared or uncertain or just in need of that human element on their way into surgery. I'm whole when I'm in that moment." ■

Kristin Berlin, Certified Surgical Technologist



Expert care from people who care. It's more than our tagline—it's the relentless drive we bring to carry out our mission every single day. Interested in joining the team? Follow St. Clair Health Careers on Facebook and LinkedIn or visit stclair.org.