



MedStar Montgomery
Medical Center

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FOCUSED ON YOU

SPRING/SUMMER 2019

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HEALTH NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM MEDSTAR MONTGOMERY MEDICAL CENTER

MedStarMontgomery.org

From *the* President



It's MedStar Montgomery Medical Center's 100th Anniversary year, and we have much to celebrate. Since opening our doors, we have grown from a humble 28-bed hospital to a cutting-edge facility that serves tens of thousands of patients each year. Today, our patients benefit from both on-site experts and the resources of the entire MedStar Health system.

While much has changed, our commitment to our community has never wavered.

Over the past century, we have cared for generations of local families. We're honored that our neighbors return to MedStar Montgomery for a lifetime of care. One great example? Mel Hardy, featured on Page 10. Mel has been a loyal participant in our Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehab Program for nearly all of its 20-year history—exactly the sort of amazing patient partnership that motivates us each day.

Through our relationships with our patients and our team's broader spirit of service (see page 3), MedStar Montgomery is building a healthier local and global community. In this issue of *Focused on You*, you will find stories that showcase our commitment to giving back, our clinicians' medical excellence, and our patients' inspiring resilience. We are proud of all we have accomplished together in the past 100 years and excited to continue delivering the latest in medical care for generations to come.

Yours in good health,

THOMAS J. SENKER, FACHE

President, MedStar Montgomery Medical Center
Senior Vice President, MedStar Health

FOCUSED ON YOU

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MedStar Montgomery Medical Center

COMMUNITY CLASS SCHEDULE

EXERCISE CLASSES

Yoga, Beginner and Intermediate
\$60 for 6 weeks, dates vary

SENIOR CLASSES

Gentle Flow Yoga for Seniors
\$40 for 8 weeks, dates vary

Tai Chi
FREE, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays

Senior Strength & Balance
FREE, Dates vary

Zumba Gold
FREE, Mondays and Wednesdays

DIABETES CLASSES

Diabetes Self-Management
\$40 for 2 weeks, dates vary

Pre-Diabetes
\$40 per 2-week session, dates vary

See also: *Diabetes Support Group* below.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Home Alone
For ages 8 to 11, \$35
Third Saturday of each month

Babysitting + CPR
For ages 12 to 15, \$75, dates vary

SUPPORT GROUPS

Breastfeeding Support Group
FREE, drop-in every Thursday

Chronic Illness
FREE, first Wednesday of each month

Diabetes Support Group
FREE, last Thursday of each month

Mothers' Support Group
FREE, drop-in every Monday

FreshStart®: Smoking Cessation Program
FREE, every Friday

PARENTING CLASSES (dates vary)

Complete Childbirth Preparation
\$150 for 6 weeks

Childbirth Express: \$75

Lamaze Technique: \$60

Breastfeeding Basics: \$30

Infant Care: \$30

See also: *Mothers' and Breastfeeding Support Groups* above.

OTHER CLASSES

Living Well: A workshop for people living with a chronic disease or condition
FREE, dates vary

For full descriptions and to learn more about dates and times, visit MedStarMontgomery.org/Classes or call **301-774-8881 (Option 4)**.

Caring for Our Community at Home and Abroad



Thomas J. Senker, FACHE, President of MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, lends a hand during Corporate Give Back Day.

At MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, our vision is to be the trusted leader in caring for people and advancing health in the communities that we serve. This commitment extends beyond medicine and far from Maryland. Whether in our own backyard or continents away, our team is always looking for ways to make a difference.

LAYING A FOUNDATION

MedStar Montgomery regularly teams up with local nonprofit organizations to build a holistically healthy community. During our last annual Corporate Give Back Day, MedStar Montgomery volunteered with Rebuilding Together Montgomery County (RTMC) to ready a home for Housing Unlimited, Inc., an RTMC partner.

RTMC provides free critical home repairs, energy efficiency upgrades, and accessibility modifications to the county's most vulnerable residents. Housing Unlimited, Inc. provides affordable, independent housing for local adults in mental health recovery.

MedStar Montgomery volunteers painted, landscaped, and prepped a house for a happy new tenant—providing a member of our community with a fresh start.

BUILDING GLOBAL HEALTH

Urogynecologist Robert E. Gutman, MD, FACOG, and surgical nurse Lenora Kroll, RN, BSN, often work side by side in MedStar Montgomery operating rooms. But for two weeks each year, you can find them hard at work over 7,000 miles away, in Kigali, Rwanda.

These medical mission trips are organized by the International Organization for Women and Development (IOWD), a nonprofit that works to train local medical providers and provide free, specialized care to women and children in low-income countries. Much of their work in Rwanda focuses on obstetric fistulas, a painful and stigmatizing condition that can result from insufficient medical care during childbirth.

Dr. Gutman, program director of the MedStar Washington Hospital Center/Georgetown University Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery Fellowship, has completed eight trips to Rwanda with IOWD. Lenora, the manager of the operating room at MedStar Montgomery, recently completed her fifth. Dr. Gutman and Lenora, both members of the IOWD medical advisory board, are joined on each trip by a urogynecology fellow—this year, Jocelyn Fitzgerald, MD—and a group of colleagues from around the country. On their most recent trip, the IOWD team performed about 150 medical exams and 50 surgical procedures.



Left to right: Lenora Kroll, RN, BSN; Robert E. Gutman, MD, FACOG; and Jocelyn Fitzgerald, MD, in Rwanda

IOWD is distinguished by its commitment to medical education and preventive care. "IOWD's ultimate goal is to make our existence unnecessary," says Dr. Gutman. "By training local providers, we work to impact Rwanda both today and in the future."

Lenora is brought back year after year by the powerful impact of quality medical care. "Each trip, many of the women we treated the previous year come out to greet us, performing a dance to demonstrate their appreciation," she says. "While our trips are challenging, seeing their recovery makes it all worthwhile." ◀

Learn more about how MedStar Montgomery is giving back by visiting [MedStarMontgomery.org/Community](https://www.MedStarMontgomery.org/Community)

Solving Complex Health Issues *One Step at a Time*



Kellie Flor Robinson of Silver Spring, Maryland, has overcome agonizing spinal pain again and again. The secret to her complex recovery? It's been surprisingly simple: She found a physician who listens.

That doctor is MedStar Montgomery Medical Center neurosurgeon Alexandros D. Powers, MD, FAANS. "My job is to listen to a patient's story and use my medical knowledge to sort through the information and determine the source of the problem," he says.

CATCHING WHAT OTHERS MISSED

Kellie suffers from multiple connective tissue disorders and advanced rheumatoid arthritis, conditions that forced her to navigate the medical system near-daily for a decade. Autoimmune conditions such as these

can cause debilitating fatigue, weakness, inflammation, and infections, as well as permanently damage muscles, nerves, and bones when left untreated. But when back pain made walking even a few steps nearly impossible for Kellie in 2007, multiple specialists and even magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) could not completely explain the problem.

In 2009, Kellie decided to reconnect with Dr. Powers, a specialist in spinal surgeries that restore the ability to move freely. She had first seen him for an evaluation several years earlier and recalled how carefully he had explained spine mechanics and discussed her medical history with her. Perhaps his methodical approach could help her again.

Thanks to his expertise in spinal mechanics, Dr. Powers diagnosed Kellie with spondylolisthesis and spinal

"Dr. Powers thinks outside of the box. He approached my health issues systematically and was willing to do the detective work to figure out what was causing my pain."

-Kellie Flor Robinson

Dr. Powers surgically fused the dislocated disc into its correct location, providing long-awaited pain relief. But as fate would have it, it was not the last time he would help Kellie overcome a serious medical challenge.

BEATING THE ODDS—AGAIN

In 2010, Kellie was in a terrifying car accident that left her on life support for eight days. Against all odds, she survived.

Kellie spent months regaining strength but could not walk. She suffered such off-the-scale pain that her recovery was at a near standstill in 2013. Doctors told her she was dealing with a muscle weakness but again offered no real solutions.

"I was in a dark place, emotionally," she says. "I had numbness in my feet and couldn't stand for more than 30 seconds."

Desperate for help, she returned to Dr. Powers. He noticed an important clue. Kellie was unable to lift her arms, a symptom that suggested nerve damage.

"It wasn't a strength issue after all, but an injury to the nerves in her neck that had been masked by other symptoms," Dr. Powers says. He performed two more spine surgeries to release pressure on Kellie's spinal nerves and ease her pain once more.

The secret to Kellie's complex recovery? Finding a physician who listens.

stenosis. While other specialists had identified Kellie's spondylolisthesis—a condition where one or more vertebrae slip out of their carefully stacked position—they had missed the stenosis, a narrowing of the spinal canal that puts painful pressure on nerves.



Alexandros D. Powers, MD

Dr. Powers first suspected stenosis because of Kellie's description of her pain: When she moved, her back hurt. When she lay down, the pain subsided. "Since an MRI is taken lying down, it could not pinpoint where the vertebra was compressing the nerves in the spinal canal. An X-ray, which can be taken standing up, revealed the problem," he says.

Today, Kellie can walk about 50 feet with a cane. "Not bad for someone who was told by several specialists that I would never walk again," she says. Her recovery is due to her tireless pursuit of the answers she needed and the thoughtful approach and skill Dr. Powers brought to her case.

"Dr. Powers thinks outside of the box," Kellie reflects. "He approached my health issues systematically and was willing to do the detective work to figure out what was causing my pain. He went so many extra miles—and never gave up on me." ◀◀

For more information, visit MedStarMontgomery.org/Neuro or call **301-570-8554**.

Worth the Battle

Breast Cancer Care Comes with Struggles but Brings New Hope



“Getting this diagnosis was both surprising and devastating.”

That’s how Mary Ellen Gillard of Gaithersburg, Maryland, recalls feeling in the fall of 2017, when doctors discovered lumps during her routine yearly mammogram. An ultrasound and biopsy confirmed the 63-year-old had three tumors on her left breast and a small one on her right.

“It was a total shock. I never thought I would get breast cancer,” Mary Ellen says. “It doesn’t run in my family. I never had any signs or symptoms.”

Yet the diagnosis was real—and so was the need to treat the cancer quickly. After meeting with surgeon Dawn Johnson Leonard, MD, FACS, site director of the MedStar Breast Health Program at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, Mary Ellen decided to have a bilateral mastectomy. “It was not a hard decision,” she says. “I just wanted the cancer out of my body and gone as fast as possible.”

Dr. Leonard removed Mary Ellen’s tumors in December 2017. Mary Ellen was offered the option of reconstructive surgery on her breasts but declined. “I’m very active. I play sports: softball, tennis, yoga. I work out. My husband said it was totally up to me, and I just didn’t want to go through any more surgeries,” she explains.

She did, however, need months of additional treatments, including chemotherapy and radiation. The experience was challenging, with the therapies causing her to lose her hair and leaving her feeling totally exhausted.

But in the end, the battle was worth it.

"I'm so fortunate my doctors caught this. There is such power in hearing those words: 'You are cancer-free.' I am just so grateful."

Mary Ellen Gillard

Today, Mary Ellen's cancer is gone, her body is healing, and her hair is growing back. "I'm feeling really good," she says. "I'm not where I want to be physically just yet, but I'm doing yoga, mowing my lawn, and I got in one softball game before the season ended."

Her family and friends were a much-needed support system throughout her treatment experience, which consisted of about 60 appointments over nine months. Her caring MedStar Montgomery medical team also helped immensely.

"I'm so glad it's over, but I must say that the support and care I received from all the doctors, receptionists, technicians, and community outreach professionals was phenomenal," Mary Ellen says. "They were so kind, thorough, and understanding. I never felt like they were trying to rush me in and out. One doctor listened to me for 30 minutes one day when I needed to talk."

"Community hospitals like MedStar Montgomery are the backbone of hospital care in the U.S.," says Dr. Leonard.



Dawn Johnson Leonard, MD, FACS

"We want our patients to receive state-of-the-art, cutting-edge care for common diseases, close to home. Breast cancer is one of the four most common cancers in America, and we pride ourselves on managing it thoroughly and well. We know that holistic care is so important. We make sure to focus not just on physical support, but emotional support as well. Mary Ellen's optimism and

Breast Cancer Care at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center

Top breast cancer care combines the latest advances with compassion and sensitivity—all delivered by doctors, nurses, and support staff with the right experience. At MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, our breast program team provides a comprehensive approach, giving you the guidance and support you need—from diagnosis through treatment and follow-up care.

We welcome the chance to help you with an initial diagnosis or offer a second opinion. We treat a range of breast conditions for both women and men.

Our breast program provides easy access to the advanced specialty care you need, with our team working together to create a comprehensive plan customized to your condition, needs, and preferences.

strength carried her through, and a strong network of personal and professional supports is critical for every patient."

Now that she is getting her energy back, Mary Ellen says everyone has noticed—including her 2-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter.

"Recently she said to me, 'Gigi, you are all better now, right?' Even she can tell," Mary Ellen says. "I'm so fortunate my doctors caught this. There is such power in hearing those words: 'You are cancer-free.' I am just so grateful." ◀◀

For more information or to make an appointment, visit [MedstarMontgomery.org/Breast](https://www.medstar-montgomery.org/Breast) or call **301-570-7424**.

Truly Transformed

Getting Healthy with the Help of Weight Loss Surgery

Two years ago, when the scale hit 391 pounds, George Clanton knew he needed to get a handle on his lifelong struggle with food. He decided he no longer wanted to tackle the problem alone.

"I had a long way to go and realized I could use some help," the 54-year-old says.

The resident of Silver Spring, Maryland, sought that help from John S. Brebbia, MD, a general surgeon specializing in advanced laparoscopic and bariatric surgery at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center. Dr. Brebbia stressed that while weight loss procedures help take pounds off, the surgery has to be combined with a patient's hard work and commitment to change. George was on board.

"I know some folks think about bingeing prior to the surgery, but I think this mindset works against them. I knew I needed to make better lifestyle changes, and I started doing that before surgery. I lost 67 pounds but felt the surgery would give me an advantage and accelerate the process of getting me healthier."

George underwent the sleeve gastrectomy in 2016. While he considers it one of his best decisions, he admits it wasn't easy. The first 36 hours were especially challenging. "You are so used to eating and drinking a certain way, and you just can't do that anymore," George says. "I even had to train myself to drink tinier sips."

He says setting up a support system is key. For George, that was his wife. She was there every step of the way, including getting him up to walk every hour while he was in the hospital. "My wife's support was a critical part of my success," he says.

George was back to work after three weeks and ultimately lost 175 pounds. As the weight came off, he became more confident and learned that he enjoys exercise.

"I now go to regular spin classes and take the dog for walks with great speed and energy. I even got asked to come to a pick-up soccer game—and for a guy who was never chosen for teams in school, that was so cool to be seen as someone able to do an athletic activity," he explains.

His relationship with food has changed too. Fried chicken is no longer appealing, but lentils, vegetables, and soups are. Even so, he is mindful every day about his food choices. "I think in many ways, the struggle begins around the two-year mark when your weight loss stops and you have to maintain it going forward," he says.

"The changes only last when a patient commits to living a healthier lifestyle," Dr. Brebbia agrees.

"Surgery makes it easier to keep that commitment, and the benefits are so wide-ranging. It's about so much more than losing weight. It's about regaining your health and saying goodbye to high cholesterol, diabetes, sleep apnea, joint problems, and more."



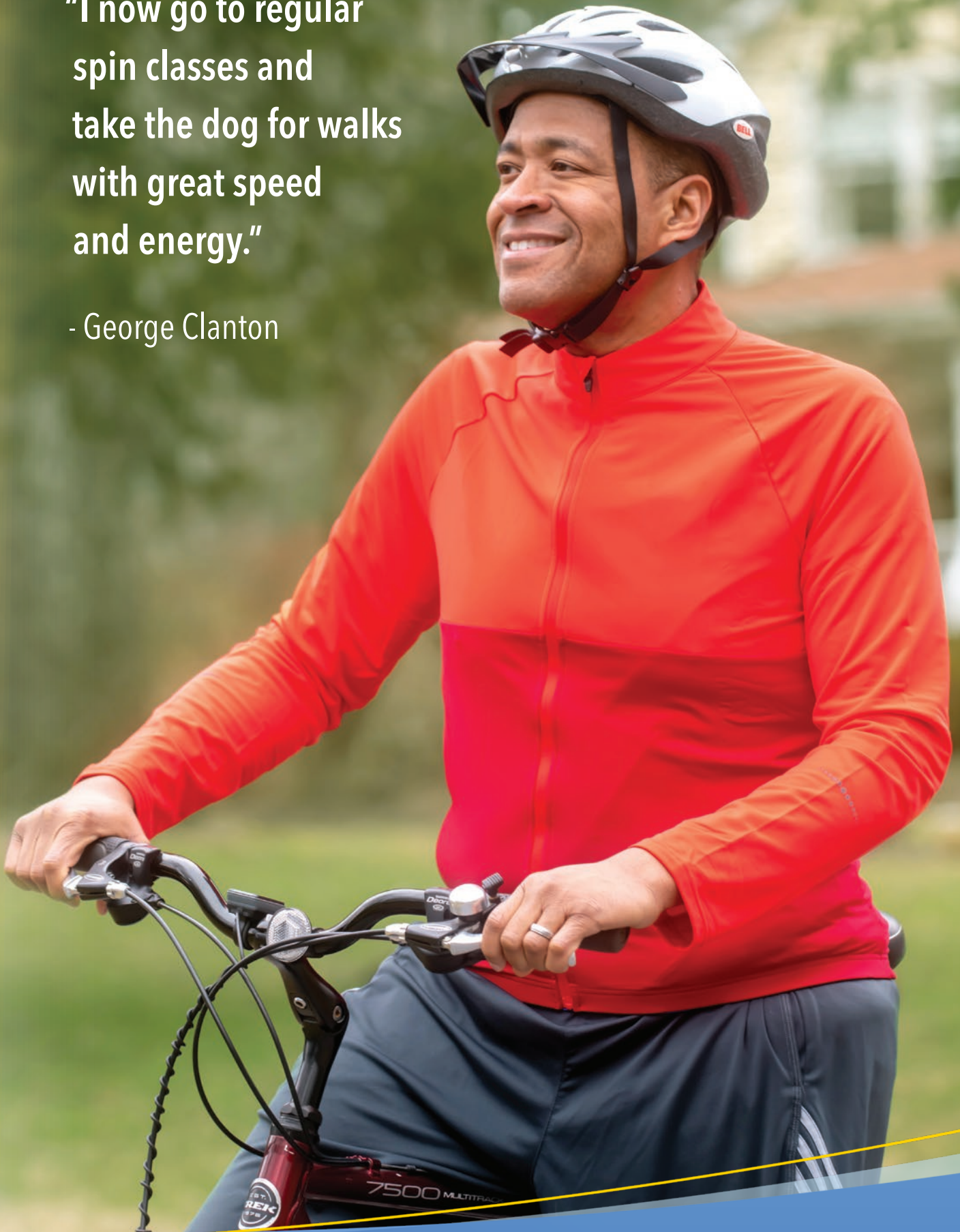
John S. Brebbia, MD

George's sleep and blood pressure have improved, and he says his life has truly transformed. "It requires a lot of work," he says. "But I'm very happy with my decision. The only regret I have is that I didn't do it sooner." ◀◀

For more information, visit
[MedStarMontgomery.org/Weightloss](https://www.MedStarMontgomery.org/Weightloss)
 or call **301-774-8828**.

"I now go to regular spin classes and take the dog for walks with great speed and energy."

- George Clanton



"I tell the newcomers to cardiac rehab to keep coming back. The heart doesn't repair itself. We need to keep it healthy—our lives depend on it."

- Mel Hardy



Mel Hardy has been attending MedStar Montgomery's Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehab Program since 2001. Here, he works out under the guidance of exercise physiologist Lucy Garcia.

Breaking Records *and* a Dangerous Family Legacy

Eighty-one-year-old Melvin Hardy says that his surname is a true misnomer. “The men in my family are far from hardy. Most never got past 70, and they all died of heart disease,” Mel says. When he suffered his own cardiac incident in 2000, Mel decided the family curse would end with him.

“My cardiologist told me to go to cardiac rehab at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center,” he explains. “I was overweight and out of shape, and I knew that if I was going to help myself, I had to follow doctor’s orders.”

That was 2001—“June 7, to be exact,” Mel adds. And he has been going faithfully ever since, twice a week for an hour each day. That’s a record-breaking 1,500-plus sessions at last count. He has been a loyal participant for nearly all of the 20-year history of the hospital’s Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program. But he hasn’t been around for quite as long as the hospital itself, which celebrates its centennial this year, he is quick to note with a laugh.

Mel’s devotion to rehab has paid off. He’s lost 42 pounds and strengthened “the most important muscle in the body—the heart,” he says. And he has lived well past 70.

EXERCISE FOR THE HEART

In the cardiac rehab gym, Mel’s exercise routine is ably overseen by Lucy Garcia, an exercise physiologist, and nurses who work exclusively with heart and lung disease patients. “Lucy really knows her stuff,” says Mel.

“Our heart patients are initially prescribed a 12-week, three-day-a-week rehab protocol,” Lucy explains. “We work to improve their level of endurance and muscle strength, and patients use a variety of equipment, such as a stepper, stationary bike, and treadmill.”

“Patients are also carefully monitored,” she adds. “We check blood pressure and heart rate before and after exercise.” More than 60 patients move in and out of the

busy gym every day. While a number of patients continue their sessions past their prescribed program, Mel’s extraordinary effort is far from typical.

FUN, HARD WORK, AND EDUCATION

“People ask me why I do it. My feeling is, why stop something that is helping me?” says Mel. “Over the years I have seen people complete the program and stop exercising with a bad result. For me, it’s been a lot of fun, hard work, and an education. It’s worthwhile doing.”

Mel also regularly visits his cardiologist, Reed Shnider, MD, medical director of Cardiac Rehabilitation and



Reed Shnider, MD

Wellness Services at the MedStar Heart and Vascular Institute. “Research consistently suggests that people like Mel who participate in cardiac rehab live longer and have fewer additional cardiac events. There are added benefits of decreased depression and the chance to learn about nutrition and stress management. There’s no downside,” says Dr. Shnider.

In between doctor visits and rehab, Mel enjoys his seven grandchildren and his wife, Jean’s Italian cooking, simple pleasures he says he’s around to enjoy because of cardiac rehab.

“I have learned that if you stop moving, you stop living. I tell the newcomers to cardiac rehab to keep coming back. The heart doesn’t repair itself. We need to keep it healthy—our lives depend on it.” ◀◀

For more information or to schedule an appointment, visit [MedStarMontgomery.org/HeartHealth](https://www.MedStarMontgomery.org/HeartHealth) or call **301-570-7404**.

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Celebrating a Century of Advancing Health Together

MedStar Montgomery Medical Center opened its doors almost a hundred years ago on the foundation of an ambitious vision—to become the trusted leader in caring for people and advancing health care in Montgomery County.

Since that day, much has changed, but what remains the same is our commitment to that vision. We also remain dedicated to our mission to enhance our community's health and well-being by offering high quality, compassionate, and personalized care. And, we're still driven by our core values of service, patient first, innovation, respect, integrity, and teamwork. Olney, thank you for allowing us to care for you.

Stay up-to-date with content, announcements, and events related to **#MMMC100** on Facebook at [Facebook.com/MedStarMontgomery](https://www.facebook.com/MedStarMontgomery).


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ANNIVERSARY