

WELCOME

On the cover:

When 4 local people needed kidneys, 4 others stepped up to make it work. Photos by Elizabeth Gorbey and Robb Malloy.

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We've been part of the region for more than 100 years — celebrating with you at parades, fairs and sports events and supporting happenings that lift up our communities. Here's the latest on how we're connecting with you and your neighbors.

Better health is easier in Bellefonte • Geisinger Multi-Specialty Clinic Bellefonte has welcomed its first patients! Primary care, lab, radiology and dermatology services are now available to nearby Centre and Clinton County residents — and a new ConvenientCare location will soon offer walk-in care, too.



High-tech joint replacement in Lycoming County • The orthopaedic team at Geisinger Jersey Shore Hospital performed a total knee replacement that was the first Mako® robotic-assisted joint surgery in the region. Using a virtual 3D model, our surgeons can plan and perform total knee, partial knee and total hip replacements with greater accuracy.

More inpatient care in Scranton • After moving behavioral health services to a new facility in Moosic, Geisinger Community Medical Center has opened a newly renovated 22-bed unit for medical-surgical inpatients. That lets us care for more patients who need a hospital stay and relieves pressure on our emergency room.



Nursing education support through Mifflin County grant ullet

A \$100,000 grant from the Mifflin County Commissioners went toward simulation laboratory technology at the Gesinger School of Nursing in downtown Lewistown.

Such local government support is welcome — and crucial — as the demand for nurses grows.







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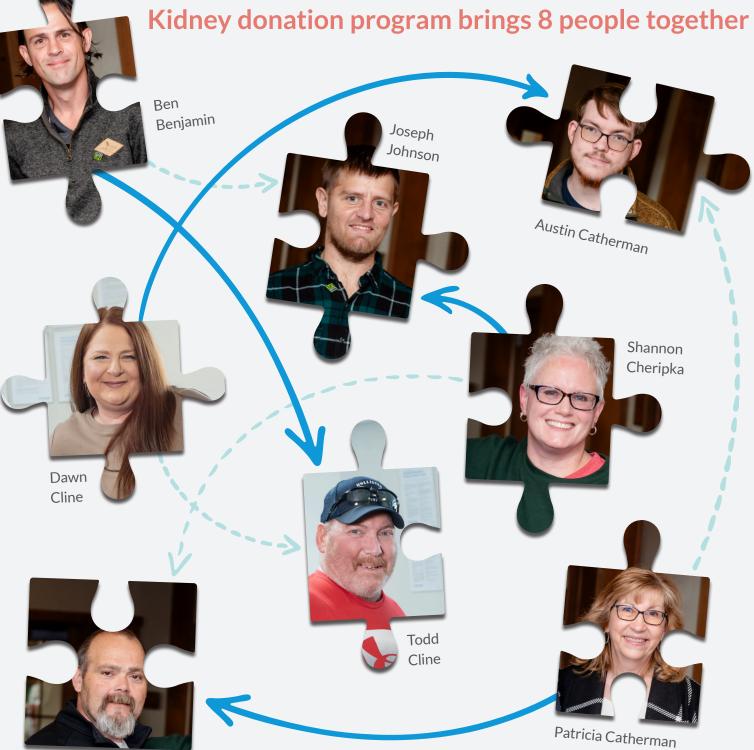
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Geisinger

PA HEALTH MAGAZINE

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A perfect match



Guy Higdon

Family/friends - - - - - >

Donated kidney -

For 4 patients in need of kidneys, Geisinger's living donor program was the gift of a lifetime.

Todd Cline's kidneys were failing. The 60-year-old was undergoing home dialysis and placed on the waiting list for a kidney transplant. In early 2024, Mr. Cline's wife, Dawn Cline, stepped up to donate one of her kidneys to her husband.

But it turned out the Lewistown couple weren't a good match in a medical sense. Ms. Cline decided instead she'd donate a kidney to a stranger who was compatible. Her decision touched off a remarkable chain of events at Geisinger Medical Center: Four willing donors, including Ms. Cline, who were not a match with their intended recipients, were instead paired with 4 strangers on the national kidney transplant waiting list.

The 4 recipients and 4 donors participated in Geisinger's living donor paired donation program, which pairs a donor with a match and finds a new match for the patient who needs a kidney.

Through the living donor program, recipients may not have to wait as long for a kidney as they would being on the transplant waiting list. That means less time on dialysis — or perhaps avoiding it entirely.

Piecing together a miracle

The 4 kidney transplants took place in May and June 2024:

- Ms. Cline donated a kidney to Austin Catherman of Mifflinburg, Pa.
- Mr. Catherman's mother, Patricia Catherman, had volunteered to donate a kidney to her son, but wasn't an ideal match due to their age difference. Instead, she donated to Guy Higdon of Carbondale, Pa.
- Mr. Higdon's sister-in-law, Shannon Cheripka, had volunteered to travel from her home in Powder Springs, Ga., to donate to her brother-in-law, but wasn't a match. So she donated to Joseph Johnson of Wysox, Pa.
- Ben Benjamin of Rome, Pa., had wanted to donate a kidney to his friend Mr. Johnson. But because he wasn't a match, Mr. Benjamin donated to Todd Cline.

Geisinger living donor coordinator Denise Hall worked with the families and arranged all the matches.

"We're always looking for internal exchanges, to match pairs we have within our system, but it's not every day that I deal with an arrangement involving 4 pairs!" Ms. Hall says.

You can become a living kidney donor and save a life, too. Geisinger's transplant program will support you throughout the donation process. The procedure is minimally invasive, which means a quicker and easier recovery.

Make a difference today: geisinger.org/donors

66 Donating is a selfless act to begin with, but to still agree to donate even though you're not compatible with who you want to donate to is pretty remarkable. ""

- Denise Hall, Geisinger living donor coordinator

Because of you

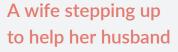
Several of those involved in the 4-way transplant met at a reunion in November 2024, generously funded by Dr. Charlie White.

You can support Geisinger's transplant program, too: geisinger.org/becauseofyou

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What's it like having a new healthy kidney? At age 60, says Mr. Cline, "I got my life back."

He adds, "People don't realize how much dialysis takes from your life. I was going 3 days a week for at least 4 hours away from home."

Ms. Cline, 49, joined the living donor program to help her husband and another person who needed a kidney.

"We met the other families. They were so grateful. It felt like family," she said.

If it were possible, Ms. Cline says she'd donate again with no hesitation. "Regardless of what you go through in recovery, it's all worth it. You saved a life."

Now that it's all over, "I feel 100%," Mr. Cline says. "I went back to work in early August. I tell my wife all the time I owe it all to her — she started all this."

But he's grateful to his donor, too, adding, "I message Ben Benjamin from time to time and tell him his kidney is working well in my body."



A mother doing what's best for her son

Though he was just 22, before his kidney transplant, Austin Catherman was always tired and had no energy.

"I slept all the time," he says. "I couldn't stay awake to hang out with friends or even work."

Patricia Catherman, his mother, says he was diagnosed with kidney disease around 2019.

"From the time of his diagnosis, the goal for Austin was to find a living kidney donor before he would require dialysis, and Denise Hall worked diligently to make that happen," she says.

Ms. Catherman, 63, was happy to participate in the paired donation program. "It was going to help Austin get a kidney sooner and would benefit someone else," she says. "I have faith in God and it helped me to trust it was happening the way it should."

Through it all, Mr. Catherman is grateful to Dawn Cline for donating the kidney that turned his life around.

"Today I'm able to stay awake all day, which is nice,"
Mr. Catherman says. "I really want to get back to hanging
out with friends and riding 4-wheelers with them."



In-laws showing love and appreciation

Guy Higdon, 52, was diagnosed with kidney disease about 8 years ago.

"It came to a head when I needed to go on dialysis and they put me on the transplant list," he says. "I was no longer able to work and was tired all the time."

Shannon Cheripka, 53, had hoped to donate a kidney to her brother-in-law, Mr. Higdon. But their blood types weren't a match.

Still, Ms. Cheripka says, "I wanted to help. If I couldn't help Guy directly, maybe I could help someone else. I found out Joseph [Johnson] had kidney disease since he was born, and I was a perfect match for him."

Mr. Higdon is so thankful to Ms. Catherman for donating to him — and he's amazed at how Geisinger orchestrated the 4-way transplant. "I'm extremely grateful to all," he says. "It worked out wonderfully for me and my family."



Joseph Johnson, 31, had kidney disease since he was a baby and was on dialysis for more than 5 years, which drained his energy and stamina. He couldn't work or exercise.

Johnson

Thankfully, family friend Ben Benjamin stepped up to donate a kidney.

"My mother donated her kidney for a friend 10 years ago. She led by example," says Mr. Benjamin, 43. He wanted to do the same for his friend.

"I didn't match with Joseph, but I found out about the match program and I was like, 'Let's do it.' It felt right."

Mr. Benjamin's feelings were confirmed when he got to know the recipient. "When I met Todd Cline, I made a friend right away," he says. "Todd and Dawn are good people. I was glad to do that for them."

Reflecting on the network-style donation process, Mr. Johnson is grateful that Ms. Cheripka agreed to be his match. "For her to give up a kidney, it's life-altering," he says. "I'm excited to get back to work. I returned to the gym, and I'd really like to start traveling."

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By Kimberly Adler-Morelli

An hour a day, nature's way

Remember that New Year's resolution to exercise more? As the weather warms, why not get moving outside? Not only can you enjoy watching nature in bloom, but you'll boost your mental health, improve your sleep and enhance your immune system.

Spin your wheels

Two wheels is a twofer! Along with being low-impact exercise, bicycling is easy to incorporate into your daily life. Hop on your bike to run errands or visit a friend. Cycling builds lower body muscles, increases flexibility and improves balance. It can even help with conditions like arthritis by getting joints moving without adding stress. That, in turn, increases blood supply and joint fluid, lubricating your joints and decreasing arthritis pain.

Ride along a Rails to Trails path for a scenic adventure. Did you know Pennsylvania has more rail-trails than any other state? The 18-mile Lebanon Valley Rail-Trail, one of the top trails in PA, allows you to tour state game lands, forests, fields and farms. Just remember to wear a helmet, whether you're cruising a bike path, trail or the open road.

For a different experience, search for electric railbikes in your area. The bikes fit onto railroad tracks and are powered by easy pedaling. Enjoy the scenery while you take a relaxing trip through the countryside.

Paddle a path to health

Take wellness to the water with a canoe, kayak, paddleboard or rowboat. Rowing or paddling strengthens your arms, shoulders, core and back. The water offers resistance, making it a perfect exercise for toning muscles.

Even better, you don't have to sink a lot of money into buying a boat. Many state parks rent watercraft for a reasonable fee. It's a good way to try out a new exercise and enjoy some beautiful waterways, like Raystown Lake in Huntingdon County — the largest lake entirely in PA. A calm, flatwater lake, it's perfect for beginners and pros alike. Wherever you choose to paddle, be sure to wear a personal flotation device, check weather conditions and go with a buddy if you can.

ZING543210 is Geisinger's health initiative for building healthier habits that will last a lifetime. Aim for these goals every day:



servings of fruit and vegetables



positive affirmations

Download our free ZING543210 kids' activity book: geisinger.org/zing



3 belly laughs



hours or less of recreational



hour of outdoor activity



sugar-sweetened beverages



Stepping up their health

Older adults who are patients at Geisinger 65 Forward health centers get to enjoy special summer events, such as picnics. One event that's spurred more outdoor activity: a weekly walking group made up of Shamokin Dam and Milton 65 Forward patients who meet at local state parks and Rails to Trails locations. By staying active and socializing, the group builds physical and mental strength, along with friendships.

Find a Geisinger 65 Forward near you: geisinger.org/patient-care/65-forward

Image: Canoe on the Delaware Water Gap

viewing platform at the northern trailhead.

Walk this way

Walking is great exercise for folks of all ages. It's

a low-impact cardio workout that can help you

attack and developing diabetes, just to name a

few benefits. And you don't have to be a speed

positive effects as running or a rigorous walk.

Pennsylvania boasts a wealth of trails, parks and

recreation areas to explore on your walks. One

hidden gem in north-central PA is Sinnemahoning

State Park in Austin. Enjoy an abundance of wildlife,

two scenic hiking trails and a wheelchair-accessible

walker or runner. Take a relaxing stroll for the same

core strength and reduce the risk of a heart

lose weight, control your blood pressure, increase

Minimally invasive tendon repair - maximum results





By Harlan Spector and Kimberly Adler-Morelli

ifty-year-old Douglas Mason found himself in pain after a friendly arm-wrestling match went south.

"I heard and felt a big pop and felt the pain," says Mr. Mason, a farmer who lives in Pennsylvania Furnace in Huntingdon County. "It turned black and blue clear up to my shoulder."

A doctor told him he had torn a tendon in his right biceps muscle and could lose some mobility in his arm if he didn't have surgery. Mr. Mason worried that his injury might keep him from doing what he loved: hunting and fishing. But he was hesitant at first about having the surgery.

Then Mr. Mason was referred to Nigel Sparks, MD, a Geisinger orthopaedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine.

"At first, I was skeptical of having surgery," Mr. Mason says. "But I liked Dr. Sparks because he was blunt and straight up. He was very thorough answering all my questions."

Dr. Sparks performed minimally invasive outpatient surgery to repair Mr. Mason's ruptured distal biceps tendon, which runs from the biceps muscle down through the elbow. He used small incisions, which means less trauma to the tissues and faster recovery.

"Everything went very smoothly," Mr. Mason says. And because his biceps muscle is as good as new, he's back to his farmwork, as well as his outdoor hobbies. "To this day, I have no limitations whatsoever. If I wouldn't have got it

done, I'd have probably lost 70% movement in my arm. I'd have had to change my whole lifestyle. I'm 100%, probably 110% now."

What really stood out to Mr. Mason was the care he received after the surgery. Dr. Sparks took a personal interest in his recovery, making sure he had the right therapist to help him heal.

Dr. Sparks, who joined Geisinger at State College and Lewistown in 2022, knows a thing or two about sports injuries from his days as a pro soccer player and All-American Penn State athlete. He had broken bones and 2 surgeries and understands the importance of rehabilitation.

"Having those injuries and understanding what recovery involves helps me motivate my patients and tell them what their recovery is going to be like," Dr. Sparks says.

"I'm very focused on rehabilitation after surgeries, and I think I give my patients insight on what to expect."

Dr. Sparks specializes in treating ligament, tendon and cartilage injuries. He sees a range of patients, from young athletes with knee ligament injuries to people in their 80s with shoulder problems.

"I consider myself a soft tissue orthopaedic surgeon," he says. "I work on problems around the bones as opposed to the bones themselves. Most of the cases I do are arthroscopic. We do the surgery though small incisions."

Healing the whole person

People often think sports medicine is all about athletes, but most injuries don't happen while playing sports, Dr. Sparks says.

"If you're out gardening and you develop pain in your elbow, that's really a sports injury. If you walk the dog every day and your knee starts to bother you, that tends to be a sports injury," he says. "It's repetitive trauma to the joint or tendon or ligament that requires my attention."

Dr. Sparks is well-versed in how athletes challenge their bodies, having played soccer for Penn State and the Canadian Olympic Soccer Team, as well as professionally for the Toronto Blizzard and Philadelphia Freedom.

Since then, he's applied his knowledge as team physician for professional sports teams, including the Seattle Sounders (soccer), Jacksonville Jaguars (football) and Jacksonville Giants (basketball).

"I played as a professional and then I took care of professionals. I got to see it from both sides," Dr. Sparks says. "Being on the sidelines as a team physician, I saw what's involved in care. It's not just about the injury itself, but how it affects the person as a whole."

Watch Doug Mason's story in his own words:

• geisinger.org/dougmason



By Kimberly Adler-Morelli

Growing your own tea garden is a fantastic way to enjoy fresh, aromatic herbs right at home.
Whether you have a spacious backyard or a cozy balcony, you can tend a beautiful garden that is useful, too. Here are some tips to get started.



Choose the location

The first step is to find the right spot for your tea garden. Most herbs

thrive in sunny conditions. If you have limited space, don't worry! You can use raised beds or containers on a balcony, patio or windowsill.



Prepare the soil

Herbs need well-draining soil to prevent root rot and promote healthy growth.

A well-prepared soil mix will provide the right nutrients for your herbs to flourish. If you're using containers, opt for a high-quality potting mix.

Start from seeds or seedlings

You can start your tea garden from seeds or buy young plants from a local nursery. Seeds are cost-effective and come in a wide variety of options, while seedlings give you a head start and are easier for beginners.

Then follow the instructions on the seed packet or plant care tag or consult with the nursery for specific guidelines.

Water regularly

Most herbs prefer moderate watering. Make sure to water regularly, but don't

overwater — it can lead to root rot.



Prune and harvest

Regular pruning encourages bushier growth, so you'll have a continuous supply of fresh leaves for tea. Harvest herbs in the morning when essential oils are at their peak.

-



Dry the herbs

Drying is a crucial step in preparing most herbs for tea. Here are a few methods you can use:

- Air drying: Tie the herbs into small bundles and hang them upside down in a ventilated area away from direct sunlight.
- •• Oven drying: Place the herbs on a baking sheet and dry them in an oven set to the lowest temperature (around 150°F) with the door slightly open.
- **Dehydrating:** Use a food dehydrator, following the manufacturer's instructions.

Common herbs used in tea

Mint

Rose

Parts used for tea: Leaves

Growing tips: Mint can become invasive if not contained. Plant in containers or its own bed to keep it from taking over your garden.

Chamomile

Parts used for tea: Flowers

Growing tips: Chamomile is a hardy perennial that will come back each year. German chamomile (Matricaria chamomilla) is less bitter and more suitable for tea. Harvest the flowers when they're nearly in full bloom to capture their best flavor.

Ginger

Parts used for tea: Leaves (for a milder flavor) and roots

Growing tips: Cut a storebought ginger root into pieces with 1 or 2 knobby buds on

each piece, and plant
them in a 12-inch clay
pot. Keep the soil moist
but not wet and place
it in direct sunlight.
Fertilize every few
weeks to support
growth. Harvest
the ginger when it is
8 to 10 months old by
digging up the entire
plant, trimming the
shoots and saving
root chunks for

replanting. Bring the

pot inside when frost begins.

Making herbal tea

Parts used for tea: Petals and hips

Growing tips: Roses need a sunny

regularly. Harvest petals when the

blooms are just past their peak. Cut

Give them plenty of space and fertilize

slits in the hips to speed up the drying process.

location with well-draining soil.

(fruits found under the blossoms)

Brewing your harvested herbs for tea is easy. Put a teaspoon of dried herbs (or more to taste) in an infuser or teapot with 8 ounces of water and heat until boiling. Let it steep 5 to 10 minutes. Remove the infuser or strain the tea.

While it's generally safe in moderation, check with a healthcare professional before making herbal tea a regular part of your diet. Some herbs may interact with medications.

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture, The University of Vermont Extension, Utah State University Yard and Garden Extension

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Nurturing recovering moms

Geisinger staff, patients and a retired OB-GYN work to make sure all patients, including those with substance use disorders, are treated with respect.

Felicia Cohen's first pregnancy was a "disaster," according to now-retired Geisinger OB-GYN Gary Stoner, MD.

Ms. Cohen agrees. She was in an abusive relationship and using drugs. Sometimes, when she'd see Dr. Stoner, she would lash out.

He responded with patience and kindness.

It's common to hear substance use disorder referred to as a disease. But people who misuse alcohol and drugs aren't always treated like patients with cancer or diabetes. At Geisinger, we're changing how we care for patients with substance use disorder, especially pregnant women and mothers — from the work of a single OB-GYN to an established program, Free2BMom, to a new initiative using peer support to improve communication and guide

people to recovery resources from the moment they step into the hospital.

All of it is just a starting point for a topic we can't afford to overlook.

Communication and compassion

Fast forward about 8 years, during which Ms. Cohen was on the run from the law, surrendered 3 children to an adopter, used heroin — and successfully sought treatment. When she was sober, in a stable relationship and pregnant again, she returned to Dr. Stoner for care. By then, he was specializing in treating women affected by the opioid epidemic.

Medicine is
often referred
to as a calling. For
Dr. Stoner, caring for
patients with substance use
disorder is truly a mission. Even today,
in retirement, he educates, advocates
and shows up to support past patients.

"Every one of his patients gets his personal cell phone number," says Ms. Cohen. "He listens to us." Dr. Stoner remains in touch with many of his former patients. And he and Ms. Cohen give talks on battling the stigma around substance use disorder, especially for pregnant women.

"When I first started, it wasn't so easy," Ms. Cohen explains. "But seeing the effect it had on people changed me. I see them crying, looking at me with compassion.

If I can change how even one person looks at addiction, it's worth it."

Dr. Stoner also finds tremendous meaning in both aspects of his career, especially watching his patients thrive over time. "It's been remarkable for me as a provider to see patients who are now married, having children, being employed," he says.

Communication between patients with substance use disorders and providers can get stuck in an unproductive cycle, he says. Patients using drugs have had bad experiences with law enforcement and the healthcare system, so they're guarded and defensive. Healthcare providers are frustrated and mistrustful.

"Sometimes, patients are punished for being honest and open," Dr. Stoner says. So when patients were truthful about substance use or not following his guidance, "I'd say, 'Thank you so much for being honest with me. You're doing the right thing. We can help you."

Going the extra mile

On a cold winter day, Markie Troutman and Valerie Andreoli, with Geisinger's Free2BMom program, are packing up their cars to travel to a court date.



Free2BMom exists because of grants and \$375,000 worth of philanthropic support.
You can help:
geisinger.org/becauseofyou

They'll meet another colleague there to advocate for a mother whose children are at risk of being placed in foster care.

"We're going to present a united front," says Ms. Troutman, Free2BMom program manager.

She and Ms. Andreoli, a case manager, feel confident in supporting the mother — because they know her well. Free2BMom is an intensely hands-on support system for moms who have substance use disorder and young children.

"We meet moms where they're at," says Ms. Andreoli. "We get them the resources they need."

"Sometimes this is a disposable population," adds Ms. Troutman, who is in long-term recovery.

Both say that many of the women they serve are just kids themselves. They come from all walks of life, but many have been abused or lacked positive role models.

The program, which serves Columbia, Luzerne, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder and Union counties, is grant funded, and the money is used for everything from diapers and wipes to books that moms can read to babies.

"We can go into jail where attorneys can go," says Ms. Andreoli, so mothers have face-to-face support during some of their most challenging times.

Experience leads to understanding

Some of the Free2BMom staff are certified recovery specialists (CRS) — which means they're in recovery themselves.

Recently, Geisinger has expanded CRS use to Geisinger Community Medical Center through the Substance Use Navigator program, led by Franca Dalibor. When a patient arrives at the emergency room with signs of substance use disorder or a positive screening, they're offered the chance to meet with a CRS.

"It's a beautiful thing because it's peer support," Ms. Dalibor explains. "Sometimes it's just a conversation. But the goal is to get them into treatment."

She adds, "Lived experience. That, and our tremendous ER staff, are the key behind the whole program."

Like Dr. Stoner and her colleagues in Free2BMom, Ms. Dalibor says the challenges of helping people navigate substance use disorder are outweighed by the rewards.

"There's something about the work that's gratifying that you can't even imagine," she says.
"It's that human connection."

Forging that bond can make all the difference in a patient's life, according to Ms. Cohen. "We are our own person, on our own path," she says. "We just need more people's help."

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Give life, share hope

When you become a live kidney donor, you become someone's hero. Geisinger's transplant program can help you save a life while supporting you throughout the donation process. Kidney donation is minimally invasive, which means a quicker and easier recovery.

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