

PA

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HEALTH

YOUR GUIDE TO FITNESS & WELL-BEING

Unshakable relief

Marsha Rodgers'
treatment for
essential tremor

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CARING AS COMMUNITY SERVICE
ARCHIVING HEALTHCARE'S HISTORY
AGING WELL AT HOME

WELCOME

On the cover:

Music teacher Marsha Rodgers regained her rhythm after deep brain stimulation surgery.

Photo by Robb Malloy.



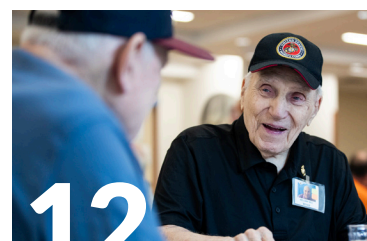
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Be entertained — with a Geisinger discount

Looking for an inspiring night out? The F.M. Kirby Center in Wilkes-Barre is offering a special \$5 discount on tickets to select shows, including *The Magic of Rob Lake*, *National Geographic Live: The Untold Story of Sharks* and *Dance of Hope*.

To claim your discount, call the Kirby Center box office at **570-826-1100** and mention the word **"Geisinger."**

Better Together

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.

Protecting and empowering farmers • At this year's Ag Progress Days, held near State College, the Geisinger Trauma team taught 129 local farmers how to respond quickly and effectively in bleeding emergencies — an especially vital skill in agricultural settings. They also distributed 136 free bleeding control kits, provided by the Pennsylvania Division of the American Trauma Society.



Celebrating community spirit • In October, Geisinger employees dressed up to join in the fun at the 78th annual South Williamsport Mummers' Parade. Building relationships through local events like this is all part of Geisinger's continual effort to demonstrate our commitment to our communities — and the health of everyone in them.

Fun, food and flu shots at the fair • Visitors to the 170th Bloomsburg Fair this September got a dose of wellness and community connection from Geisinger. Teams from across the system provided health education and free flu vaccines to protect our neighbors. Geisinger EMS also provided care services throughout the week.



Protecting against overdose • At Geisinger's third annual Narcan® (naloxone) distribution events in Wilkes-Barre and Scranton, each attendee took home 2 boxes of medication. In total, that could reverse more than 900 instances of opioid overdose in NEPA. Along with teaching attendees how to give the nasal spray, Geisinger volunteers handed out educational literature and fentanyl and xylazine testing strips, as well.

Oops! Did you peek at the answer key to the health insurance quiz in our fall issue? We accidentally switched #2 and #3. The correct answers are: 2. *formulary, exclusion, prior authorization*; 3. *copay, deductible*.

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courtesy of Olivia Zehel

By Kimberly Adler-Morelli

Conducting life / again

For Marsha Rodgers, a 48-year-old Barnesville resident, music has always been more than a profession — it's a passion, a calling and a way of life. As a music teacher and band director for the Tamaqua Area School District, a singer and a flautist, her days were filled with rhythm and harmony. But for over 14 years, an invisible force began to steal the beat from her life: a neurological condition known as essential tremor.



Watch how tremors improve after deep brain stimulation:
[geisinger.org/dbs](https://www.geisinger.org/dbs)

Essential tremor causes rhythmic, uncontrollable shaking that can affect almost any part of the body, but most commonly the hands. It can make simple tasks, like drinking from a glass or tying shoelaces, feel impossible.

In Ms. Rodgers' case, tremors began in her hands and gradually took over almost all parts of her body. Even swallowing became an issue.

"I couldn't hold a glass to drink out of it or even eat with weighted silverware," Mrs. Rodgers recalls. "I couldn't keep the food on my fork due to the tremors. Standing still was difficult because of the tremors in my legs. Everyday things were nearly impossible."

Diagnosed in 2023 after years of misdiagnoses, Ms. Rodgers' condition worsened to the point where she could no longer conduct with a baton or play instruments alongside her students. Even singing became a challenge due to vocal tremors. "I was looking at going on disability if I didn't have surgery," she says.

A life-changing discovery

Ms. Rodgers first learned about deep brain stimulation (DBS) when she saw Geisinger neurologist Cosmin Sandulescu, MD, for migraines. And after attending one of the monthly PA Health Talks on DBS given by Geisinger neurosurgeon David Ferrone, MD, she began to see a glimmer of hope.

DBS surgery can dramatically reduce debilitating tremors. "DBS surgery for essential tremor is indicated when a patient has severe debilitating tremors that can't be controlled with medications," says Dr. Ferrone. "We're not talking about just improving people's quality of life — it's also improving their sense of self."

Renee Zapach, LPN, neurology nurse navigator, helps patients like Ms. Rodgers coordinate appointments and follows up on their treatment and care. And crucially, she's there if patients just need someone to talk to.

"Renee Zapach was fantastic — she's the reason I had the surgery," Ms. Rodgers says. "She got me where I needed to go. I wasn't heard at other facilities before this."

Ms. Zapach remembers Ms. Rodgers' first visit vividly. "Her symptoms were severe — head, arms, legs, voice," she says. "We treat patients like family. When someone's

going through something so life-altering, they need help to maneuver through the healthcare system. And we want them to feel comfortable with the treatment plan."

Understanding DBS

Patients who elect to undergo DBS have electrodes implanted in specific areas of their brain. A device for generating electrical signals is also implanted under the skin of the chest and connected to the electrodes in the brain by a thin wire. The electrodes send electrical impulses that help regulate abnormal brain activity.

The DBS procedure involves 3 stages:

- 1. Bone marker implant and imaging** – MRI and CT scans done under anesthesia for planning the surgery
- 2. Lead implantation** – DBS leads placed precisely in the targeted area of the brain to improve symptoms
- 3. Battery implantation** – DBS leads connected to a neurostimulator implanted in the chest

Three weeks later, the device is turned on and fine-tuned to the patient's needs.

Surgery and recovery

Ms. Rodgers underwent the first part of her DBS surgery with Dr. Ferrone in November 2024, with the final stage completed in December.

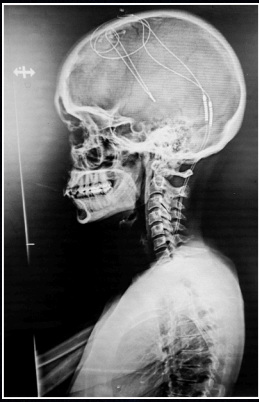
Her recovery had some complications. Ten days after the leads were implanted, she had a rare seizure due to brain swelling around the lead in her frontal lobe. "There are risks," Ms. Rodgers says. "But I would do it all over in a heartbeat, because it gave me my life back."

She now attends follow-up visits to adjust the device's programming and can even make minor adjustments herself. "For me, everyone is different. It's based on your comfort level," she says. Even side effects like speech issues and a metallic taste were resolved with small programming tweaks.

Back to the baton

Today, Ms. Rodgers is back performing music, teaching and conducting without tremors — living a life she once thought was out of reach. "I hated eating out because of my hand

Continues on p. 6



tremors, but not anymore,” she says. “Now I can perform again. I can hold my flute and play. I can sing without vocal tremors.”

She’s also become a tireless advocate, sharing her story on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube to raise awareness about DBS and essential tremors. Her podcast interview



with the International Essential Tremor Foundation was featured in their monthly “Tremor Gram.”

“She’s doing awesome,” Ms. Zapach says. “She even started a support group for people with essential tremors.”

To anyone with essential tremors and other movement conditions, Ms. Zapach recommends getting a referral to a movement disorder clinic. “There are treatments — and hope — for these types of disorders,” she says.

A message of hope and healing

Through perseverance and the power of medical innovation, Ms. Rodgers got more than symptom relief — she got the chance to reclaim what she loved.

“If you’re struggling, don’t give up,” Ms. Rodgers says. “There’s help out there. DBS gave me my life back.”

By Beth Kaszuba

Lessons in the power of community

The journey into medicine was personal for Olivia Zehel. Growing up in NEPA, she witnessed firsthand the challenges of accessing healthcare in underserved areas. Now, as a medical student at Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, she’s fulfilling her dream by serving as the student medical director at the Edward R. Leahy Jr. Clinic at The University of Scranton.

The clinic, funded entirely by private donations and grants, has provided free healthcare to uninsured residents of Lackawanna County since 2008. It briefly closed due to the pandemic. When it reopened in 2024, it had a new partner — Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine. It also had a shift in focus from acute care to more comprehensive, longitudinal care: physical exams, chronic illness management and specialized services like physical therapy and behavioral healthcare.

The partnership aligns well with the School of Medicine’s mission: Meet local healthcare needs by encouraging students to pursue primary care — and to be leaders in community service.

For Geisinger medical students like Ms. Zehel, MD Class of ’27 and a 2023 University of Scranton graduate, the clinic’s reopening allowed her to achieve a dream of volunteering there, which she’d hoped to do as an undergraduate before COVID struck.

“Part of my impetus for going into medicine was seeing the need for care in underserved areas,” says Ms. Zehel.

In her senior year, Ms. Zehel joined a university committee formed to reopen the clinic. She then chose Geisinger Commonwealth to continue serving her home region during medical school. She was mainly drawn to the school’s commitment to community service.

“Having a community-based focus was really important to me,” she says, adding that she’s part of the school’s Abigail Geisinger Scholars Program, which provides tuition forgiveness to students



who return to Geisinger and serve the region for several years after residency training.

At the Leahy Clinic, students from The University of Scranton and Geisinger do work appropriate to their level and type of education, which could mean completing administrative tasks or participating in patient care under the supervision of physician volunteers. Students from both institutions also play leadership roles and can initiate programs, like Caroline Virone, MD Class of '27, the community health chair for the clinic. In her first year of service, she launched a successful Pap smear program, so uninsured women wouldn't fall behind on cervical cancer screenings.

Like Ms. Zehel, NEPA resident, University of Scranton graduate and Geisinger medical student Nicholas Tomassoni had waited for the opportunity to volunteer after the COVID shutdown and takes advantage of the opportunity during med school.

"I wanted to support the restoration of accessible care within my community," he says. "The reopening represented a renewed commitment to our community and patient-centered care. I was motivated to contribute to that effort and support the local community that's supported me throughout my life."

Volunteering at the clinic benefits not just the patients, but the students, as Ms. Zehel has discovered.

"In the classroom, we learn about ideal scenarios," she says. "You order this test, make a diagnosis and then set a course of treatment."

But at the Leahy Clinic, providers, like their patients, face financial obstacles to care.

"Maybe we want to run a certain test, but it's too expensive," Ms. Zehel says. "Or we want to prescribe medication for a breathing condition, but the patient can't afford an inhaler. Breathing is necessary. So, we have to look for alternative ways to get them the care they need."

Mr. Tomassoni says the meaningful experience in clinical patient care he's gained through volunteering has only strengthened his career goals.

"Early exposure has provided insights into the collaborative nature of medicine, where communication is central," he says. "The experiences at the clinic have reinforced my goals of becoming a physician who provides high quality care and is engaged in both the clinical and community aspects of medicine."

Finally — some might argue crucially — the medical students have the chance to make a human connection by simply talking with patients and learning about their health and their lives.

"Students spend more time with patients and gain a deeper understanding of what brought them to the clinic that day," Ms. Zehel says. "I think that's really valuable."

Because of you

Geisinger Health Foundation maintains a fund to support the Leahy Clinic. Donations are welcome. Volunteer opportunities at the clinic are also available. To give, visit geisinger.org/becauseofyou. To ask about volunteering, call 570-941-6112.



'There's nothing that can stop me'

▶ Jennie McHenry shares her
journey back to an active lifestyle:
geisinger.org/jenniemchenry

By Harlan Spector and Lyndsey Frey

Geisinger's expertise in congenital heart defects gave this Muncy woman her energy back.

Jennie McHenry isn't one to slow down. She's an active, vibrant 50-year-old who spends her time cultivating a variety of garden vegetables at her home in Muncy, hiking the woods with her shepherd husky mix and working for the Pennsylvania State Police.

"It's a busy job," says Ms. McHenry, the supply officer for Troop F in north-central Pennsylvania. "It's strenuous. I do a lot of lifting, and I like it. It keeps me on my toes."

But not too long ago, she had trouble catching her breath while hiking a favorite state park with her family. She knew something wasn't right. Despite her active lifestyle, her stamina was decreasing.

"I'm always gung ho and the lead person, but that day I just could not keep up with everybody," she says. "I was losing my breath. I was feeling out of shape."

Testing at Geisinger Medical Center showed a heart operation she underwent in early childhood was failing — and the right side of her heart was enlarged.

At just 3 years old, Ms. McHenry had surgery for a condition called tetralogy of Fallot, a congenital heart defect that alters blood flow. But unbeknown to her, the repair doesn't last a lifetime — and

at age 48, she didn't think she'd be undergoing surgery again.

Comprehensive care for congenital heart defects

In July 2022, Ms. McHenry had reoperative heart surgery and heart valve replacement, along with reconstruction of the right side of her heart's outflow.

"My heart was so large from pumping so hard, it had compressed one of my lungs," she says.

"Now my valve is working well. I don't have shortness of breath anymore. By week 2 after surgery, I was walking 3 miles a day. By week 3, I was walking 5 miles a day. As each week went on, I felt better and better."

Her situation isn't unique. Many patients born with congenital heart disease who had surgery in childhood require additional heart surgery as adults.

The Geisinger Heart and Vascular Institute expanded its congenital heart disease treatment program in 2023, taking on more adult patients as well as pediatric cases.

"We've put together a team that consists of surgeons, congenital cardiac anesthesiologists, adult and pediatric congenital cardiologists and critical care doctors on the pediatric

and adult side," says Ms. McHenry's surgeon, Carlo Bartoli, MD, PhD, who specializes in complex reoperative congenital heart surgery in both children and adults.

Innovative heart care close to home

Ms. McHenry had considered going to Philadelphia or Pittsburgh for a consultation, but she felt confident with Dr. Bartoli.

"I did my homework on Dr. Bartoli and the whole heart team," she says. "I felt like if Dr. Bartoli was willing to take my case, that meant to me he knows what he's doing. I went with my gut and was absolutely pleased."

And she feels lucky to have access to advanced heart surgery close to home.

"Who knows what would have happened to me if I hadn't had surgery?" Ms. McHenry says.

Besides tetralogy of Fallot, among the many common congenital heart conditions Geisinger treats are atrial and ventricular septal defects, holes in the heart, valve defects and vascular anomalies.

"We have the resources. We have the expertise. Our outcomes are excellent," Dr. Bartoli says.

Ms. McHenry is one of many patients who've benefited from Geisinger's expertise. Now, a couple years after her surgery, she's back to hiking those hills, playing with her dog and working in her garden.

"I harvested about 8 watermelons this year," she says. "And before that new valve, there was no way I would be able to carry them. I feel like there's nothing that can stop me. Geisinger gave me my energy back."

If you look around many Geisinger facilities — especially the flagship hospital, Geisinger Medical Center in Danville — you'll see reminders of our history and how it's interwoven with that of the communities we serve.

As you pass through the hallways, take a moment to notice the photos and paintings on the walls and the displays of artifacts dating back to and even before the hospital's founding in 1912 by Abigail Geisinger. The George F. Geisinger Memorial Hospital, as it was called then, opened in 1915.

Scattered throughout the buildings — themselves running the gamut from venerable to modern — are antique nurses' uniforms in pristine condition, portraits of notable people who shaped the system and medical and scientific instruments that have (thankfully) evolved as Geisinger and healthcare have grown and changed, too.

There's even a small museum of microscopes through the ages in the Danville laboratory building.

"They're like pieces of art," says Kathy Heilman, who's been maintaining Geisinger's archival materials since 1983.

That's right — Geisinger has archives, and they contain more than 14,000 records that document the history of its hospitals and clinics. Ms. Heilman is headquartered in the Health Sciences Library on the lower level of the Henry Hood Center for Health Research on the Danville campus. The College of Health Sciences houses a separate archive. Both archives are available on the libraries' website.

The library features high-tech tools, like computer stations for Geisinger's many learners and researchers, interspersed with objects like an antique examination table, surgical instruments from the Civil War era ("a little brutal,"

Ms. Heilman notes) and even souvenirs from Geisingen, Germany, ancestral home of the Geisinger family.

As caretaker for all these treasures, Ms. Heilman has developed a fondness for system founder Abigail Geisinger, who appears stern in most surviving images, like her imposing oil portrait that watches over the medical center. But historical records show other sides of Mrs. Geisinger, including how she lent her personal vehicles — a carriage and later with a Hupmobile, an early model car — to transport ill people to Sunbury where the closest hospital was located.

"She was concerned about people," Ms. Heilman says. "At Christmas, she would hand out baskets of fruit. And after the hospital opened, she would visit patients, bringing them flowers from her garden."

Mrs. Geisinger was also an avid world traveler and, contrary to her serious expression in most images, was known to smile. At the laying of the hospital's cornerstone, "she has her head back and she's laughing," Ms. Heilman says.

The collected artifacts also capture the growth and change of the system Abigail Geisinger envisioned. Photos from the founding show a parade of local people celebrating the Danville hospital's opening, back when it was a relatively small building. If you search throughout the library and the campus, you'll find images that trace the evolution of the grounds up to the present day.

Those who roam deep into the corridors near the Emergency Department in Danville will discover a large, multi-panel timeline with quotes from Geisinger staff and leaders, including Harold Foss, MD, who played perhaps the second-largest role in the system's development after Mrs. Geisinger.

By Beth Kaszuba

Bringing a legacy to life

The past matters, especially in places like central and northeastern Pennsylvania, where families put down deep roots that stretch across generations.

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Dr. Foss, Geisinger's first surgeon-in-chief, was also well-traveled and came to his new career from a job in Alaska. He was a Mayo Clinic-trained proponent of innovation and research, a pioneer in the use of motion pictures to demonstrate surgical techniques, the first to produce a 35mm color motion picture that was exhibited at a national meeting (American Medical Association, 1935), and a designer of medical devices still in use today.

online. The photograph collection documents the growth of Geisinger from the time of Mrs. Geisinger to the present day. "It's always been a dream of mine to put this information out there so people can use it," she says. And she believes innovative Abigail Geisinger would be happy to see the nationally recognized healthcare system she created. "I think she'd be pleased with what we've done throughout the Geisinger system," Ms. Heilman says.



His former residence next to Geisinger Medical Center, called the Foss Home, now houses the system's administrative offices. Like the hospital, it's also filled with furniture and photographs from the Geisinger and Foss families.

As part of her job curating all these treasures, Ms. Heilman is scanning images like those of Dr. Foss working in Alaska and Abigail Geisinger on a boating trip, so they're readily available

Photos (clockwise from top left): Oak exam table (circa 1900); portrait of Abigail Geisinger with Harold Foss, MD; teapot and other items that belonged to Abigail Geisinger; late 17th-century neurosurgical instrument kit

By Kimberly Adler-Morelli

As we grow older, many of us hope to do so in the comfort of our own homes. This desire, known as “aging in place,” reflects a deep yearning for independence and dignity. But staying at home as we age requires thoughtful planning, support and a network of care.

Live well, age well – in the comfort of your home



According to the National Institute on Aging, aging in place means staying in your own home as you grow older, with the goal of maintaining independence for as long as possible. That can present challenges — like mobility issues, safety concerns and the need for medical and emotional support. But older adults in our area can rely on the compassion and expertise of LIFE Geisinger, a PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) program.

A holistic approach to aging

Cybele Pacheco, MD, director of senior-focused primary care for LIFE Geisinger, emphasizes the importance of the personalized, team-based approach the program offers. “We say ‘participants’ instead of ‘patients,’ because they’re part of a team,” she says. “The epitome of primary care for seniors is the PACE program. It’s a well-rounded, holistic approach — not focused solely on disease, but on the whole person.”

This model includes everything from home health assessments and physical therapy to social events and caregiver support. LIFE Geisinger offers services such as skilled nursing, home-delivered meals, transportation and even pet therapy. Such resources help seniors like Tamaqua resident Joan Marie Roth, 75, continue living independently. “It’s the best thing that ever happened to me,” Ms. Roth says. “LIFE Geisinger comes to my home and helps me with the things that I can’t do. Your cleaning... there’s nothing that they don’t take care of.”

The power of familiar surroundings

Familiar surroundings offer comfort and emotional stability — in fact, living at home can reduce cognitive decline and improve mental health. Kiran Rayalam, MD, assistant program director of the Geisinger Lewistown Rural Family Medicine Residency, says, “Cognitive decline is less prevalent when among familiar surroundings, memories and familiar faces as caretakers.”

Dr. Rayalam, who’s certified in geriatric medicine, encourages early conversations about aging, ideally in one’s 60s. “When we start to see physical, mental and emotional changes, the older adult may not be prepared. It’s the responsibility of the physician to guide and educate them.”

Planning ahead

Aging in place isn’t just about staying home — it’s about staying safe, connected and prepared. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention highlights key aspects such

as injury prevention, regular healthcare and maintaining mental and social well-being. Simple home modifications, like removing throw rugs or installing grab bars, can prevent falls and injuries.

Other small interventions, like ambulatory aids or weight-bearing exercise, could even prevent hospitalization. “Instead of deterioration or consistent decline, we can see flatlining or improvement” of people’s health conditions, says Dr. Pacheco.

Planning for your financial health is just as crucial. Programs like PACE are designed for low-income seniors, but understanding eligibility and preparing legal documents, such as power of attorney and advanced directives, can ease future transitions. “Having your wishes known ahead of time is important,” says Dr. Rayalam. “It should be an open conversation and updated as changes happen.”

Support for caregivers

Aging in place also affects your caregiver, who’s often juggling their own emotional and physical responsibilities. LIFE Geisinger offers respite care at local facilities and regularly surveys caregivers to identify burnout. “If there are any signs of burnout, we give proactive support,” says Dr. Pacheco.

Involving caregivers in care planning is key, says Dr. Rayalam. “Ask the patient if they’re comfortable with their care and person. Get the caregiver’s perspective — how is the patient doing and what changes do they notice?”

Community resources and connection

Social engagement is vital as you age. Programs like LIFE Geisinger offer activities ranging from gardening and music appreciation to intergenerational programs and spiritual reflection. Staying connected helps prevent loneliness, which can lead to depression and other health issues.

Local resources, such as the Area Agency on Aging, can connect seniors to care managers, volunteers and support services. Religious communities and neighborhood groups may also offer companionship and help with errands.

Aging with grace and intention

Aging in place is more than a lifestyle choice — it’s a commitment to living with dignity, autonomy and joy. When you have the right support, planning and mindset, it’s possible to thrive at home, surrounded by the people and memories that matter most.



Stuff yourself (on peppers)

This nutrient-packed dish will tempt all tastebuds.

Looking for a meal or side dish that's delicious, nutritious and easy to prepare? Vegetarian stuffed peppers might be the answer. Packed with vitamins and fiber, this dish combines the natural sweetness of peppers with the earthiness of brown rice and fresh herbs.

But the real beauty of this recipe: It's easy to make and good for you. Peppers — especially red peppers — are loaded with vitamin C, which support your immune system. Brown rice is a great source of fiber and protein and can help maintain healthy blood sugar levels.

Whether you're a seasoned vegetarian or just exploring healthier eating options, these stuffed peppers are sure to become a favorite. Serve them at home or bring them to your family gatherings.

Vegetarian stuffed peppers

Serves 4.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup uncooked brown rice
- 2 small onions, diced (fresh or frozen)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 bell peppers, any color
- 1 cup tomatoes, diced (if using canned, look for low-sodium or no salt added)
- 1 tablespoon fresh basil, chopped (can use 1 teaspoon dried)
- 1 tablespoon fresh oregano, chopped (can use 1 teaspoon dried)

Directions:

1. Heat oven to 350° F.
2. Cook rice according to package or until tender.
3. Slice the peppers lengthwise and scoop out the seeds.
4. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, add the olive oil, onions and garlic. Sauté until the onions are translucent.
5. Add the tomatoes, basil and oregano and simmer for 5 to 10 minutes.
6. Stir in cooked rice and mix until all ingredients are incorporated.
7. Spoon the rice mixture into the pepper halves and place in a baking dish.
8. Cover and bake for 30 to 40 minutes.

Want to see this dish being prepared? ➤ Go to [geisinger.org/peppers](https://www.geisinger.org/peppers).

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Lifesaving heart and vascular care

If you're 60+ and having shortness of breath or fatigue, your heart or vascular health may need attention. The good news: A minimally invasive procedure called TAVR could help — with no lengthy hospital stay or major surgery required.

At Geisinger, you can have heart and vascular procedures close to home. Talk to your primary care doctor to see if this option is right for you.

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