

100-Year-Old Thrives, Decades after Bypass

Steve Ditlea | For the Journal News | March 7, 2017

Philip Wagner is a study in how sticking to cardiac rehabilitation can pay off: He's been doing it three times a week for 26 years.

"I still have my original heart, I'm very happy to say, considering I had a quadruple bypass when I was much younger," Wagner says.

"Thank God, here I am, age one hundred."

Yes, this lively exerciser on the recumbent cross-training machine in the Northern Westchester Cardiac Rehabilitation facility in Chappaqua was born a few months before the United States entered World War I.

He endured his cardiovascular crisis and surgical restoration in 1976 — a full 41 years ago.

"I never had trouble with my heart until the heart attack," Wagner says.

"That was very difficult. I had the usual symptoms of a heart attack: terrible pain in my chest, I couldn't breathe."

Following the radical re-tubing of his heart's major blood vessels, he began a steady dedication to staying fit.

"After I'd recovered in a few weeks, they told me to walk a lot," he says. "So I walked and walked and walked."

In 1991, he began monitored cardiac rehab and has continued to exercise three times a week at the program's facilities, for 26 years. Without this activity, the medical consensus is that Philip Wagner would not be around today.

A lifetime of athletic pursuits probably added to his years. An all-star tennis player and New Jersey State Champion when a junior in high school, he played tennis until age 85.

He also attributes his longevity to solid medical advice he received after his life-saving operation: "They told me if you want to live, stop smoking." He quit smoking cold turkey, in the wake of a stressful career as a tax attorney.

"I would smoke four packs of cigarettes a day back then," Wagner says. "I don't know if that's what caused the heart attack; it certainly didn't do me any good. Here I am, nevertheless."



Philip Wagner from Armonk, 100 years old, chats with his caregiver, Monique Ayala, at the Northern Westchester Hospital cardiac rehab facility at Chappaqua Crossing in Chappaqua, Feb. 24, 2017.

Credit: Mark Vergari/The Journal News