

## Heart transplant has local man planning next 20 years

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BLOOMINGTON — Hy Roznowski got a perfect match.

We're not talking about Donna, his wife of 53 years. But she's been a good match too, and Roznowski said he couldn't have survived the past 20 years without her.

The match we're talking about is the heart he received 20 years ago Sunday — the one that saved his life.

On July 8, 1987, Roznowski, of Bloomington, made headlines in Central Illinois and in Kentucky when he got a heart transplant at Jewish Hospital in Louisville, Ky.

The procedure was newsworthy in Central Illinois because heart transplants among people here were rare at that time. In Louisville, the procedure was newsworthy because Roznowski was Jewish Hospital's 36th heart transplant patient, making the hospital eligible for Medicare funds for transplants.

Now, Roznowski, 75, belongs to another group: people who have survived for 20 years after a heart transplant.

"I've got 25 more to go," said Roznowski, a retired teacher known for his sense of humor. "I'm planning to live to be 100."

Kim McCullough, of the Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network, said that according to the publication *Clinical Transplant 2005*, about 12 people nationwide have survived for 20 years or longer after a heart transplant.

Dr. Mamdouh Bakhos is chairman of the thoracic and cardiovascular surgery department at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, where he has been doing transplants since 1983.

"Twenty years ago, we never talked about 15- to 20-year survival," Bakhos said. "Sixty to 70 percent of our patients expected to be alive five years after transplantation. Even today, 75 to 80 percent of our patients will be alive after five years."

"The most important reason for long-term survival is a perfect match," Bakhos said. "The main issue is the body accepting the new heart."

A good match, and some luck

Dr. Holly Novak — the cardiologist who referred Roznowski to Jewish Hospital 20 years ago— was thrilled for him.

"Hy has had remarkable success with this transplant," said Novak, who practiced cardiology in Bloomington-Normal from 1986 to 2000 and now practices with Prairie Cardiovascular Consultants in Springfield.

"I suspect he got lucky and got a good match."

Roznowski officially doesn't know his donor family. But, piecing together information from the Louisville area 20 years ago, he believes his donor was a 17-year-old boy who was killed when his pickup truck hit a tree.

Roznowski is not allowed by the hospital to contact the family. But each year, he takes or mails an unsigned thank you letter to Jewish Hospital, where nurses forward the letter to the donor family. He's never received a response and never expected one.

But Roznowski had something else going in his favor these past 20 years.

"He always had a zest for life," Novak said. "He did well with his transplant and he went on with life. I hope he gets 20 more."

Roznowski — who has three children, seven grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren — said "I've lived a good life, educated a lot of good kids, have a lot of friends, a great wife and a great family."

Roznowski taught in Unit 5 schools for 28½ years. Since retirement, he has taught as a substitute in Tri-Valley schools, worked at Pizza World and continues to work part-time at JMC Productions, a photo studio. He has been active in the Bloomington Knights of Columbus.

Thought he was perfectly fine

A referee for high school and college football, basketball and baseball, Roznowski thought he was in perfect condition until his first heart attack in March 1984. Surgeons determined they couldn't bypass the blockage on the right side of his heart so put him on medicine and sent him home.

In October 1986, he had his second heart attack. Novak found that the other side of his heart had a blockage and he was a candidate for a heart transplant.

"I never had any fear," he recalled. "It (the severity) didn't register."

By spring, his condition had deteriorated so much that he couldn't walk an eighth of a mile without stopping to catch his breath. Novak recommended Louisville for the transplant because Central Illinois transplant programs were just getting started then, and Louisville was known worldwide for successful transplantations.

"Somehow I knew inside of me that everything was going to be alright," Roznowski said. He was home from Louisville in a month. He returns there for tests once a year.

He played softball until three or four years ago, he still snowmobiles and cuts his own firewood. He eats red meat, uses salt and drinks alcohol, but all in moderation.

"I try to live a normal life. I've learned to relax and not let things bother me. I plan on continuing to live for a long time."

### **Transplant facts**

-- From Jan. 1, 1988, to March 31, 2007, 400,291 organ transplants — including 41,423 heart transplants — were performed in the United States. United Network for Organ Sharing began recordkeeping in 1988.

-- In Illinois since 1988, 17,235 organ transplants — including 1,436 heart transplants — have been performed.

-- Nationwide, 96,364 people are awaiting organ transplants, including 2,689 awaiting heart transplants.

-- In Illinois, 4,760 people are awaiting organ transplants, including 80 awaiting heart transplants.

-- More than 2 million Illinoisans have registered with the secretary of state's new organ donor registry.

-- To register, go to the Donate Life Web site at [www.IAmAreYou.org](http://www.IAmAreYou.org), or register at any Illinois driver's license facility, or call (800) 210-2106.

SOURCES: Kim McCullough, Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network

*Compiled by Paul Swiech*



Hy Roznowski of Bloomington talks about his heart transplant in 1987. (Pantagraph/LORI ANN COOK) July, 3, 2007)



Hy Roznowski of Bloomington places an organ donor sign in his yard. Roznowski was the recipient of a heart donation in 1987. (Pantagraph/LORI ANN COOK) July, 3, 2007)