

Winter 2025

# LiveWell

CEDAR RAPIDS

## LEG BYPASS SURGERY

St. Luke's Advanced Surgery Team  
Saves Man's Leg, Foot

## NURSE BECOMES PATIENT

New, Expanded EP Labs Deliver  
Quick Heart Care for Retired Nurse

## ROBOTIC KNEE REPLACEMENT

Same-day Joint Replacement Surgery  
Restores Patient's Active Lifestyle

## JUST-IN-TIME EMERGENCY CARE

Visit to St. Luke's Marion ER Pays  
Off Before Patient's Vacation

## ASK THE EXPERT

What St. Luke's Exclusive Partnership  
with CR's Only Anesthesiology  
Group Means for You



[unitypoint.org](http://unitypoint.org)



**UnityPoint Health**  
Cedar Rapids

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# NEW VASCULAR & INTERVENTIONAL RADIOLOGY LABS NOW OPEN

Phase 2 of St. Luke's \$25 million Heart & Vascular Expansion is complete, unveiling a new Vascular and Interventional Radiology (IR) department that includes two fully operational vascular and IR labs, as well as space for a third to accommodate future growth. These labs are used for services like imaging, biopsies, repairing aneurysms (ballooning vessels) and revascularization (restoring blood flow to blocked vessels). The new space also features dedicated pre- and post-op areas, further enhancing patient experience.

The third and final phase of the Heart & Vascular Expansion will focus on structural heart, with the addition of a hybrid operating room and state-of-the-art technology. All upgrades are happening within the existing Nassif Heart & Vascular Center, making efficient use of funding and space. The entire project highlights St. Luke's ongoing commitment as Cedar Rapids' Heart Hospital to treat the growing number of patients who need our specialized care.

Scan the QR code or visit [uph.link/CR-HV-Expansion](https://uph.link/CR-HV-Expansion) for a virtual tour of the new space and to follow our progress.



# LiveWell

Winter 2025

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## ST. LUKE'S ADVANCES LUNG CANCER CARE WITH ROBOTIC TECHNOLOGY

St. Luke's offers patients access to two robotic systems for lung cancer diagnosis and treatment: the da Vinci Xi system for minimally invasive surgery and the ION Endoluminal Robotic Bronchoscopy System for biopsies. These systems speed up diagnoses and treatment, often allowing surgery to occur soon after a confirmed biopsy.

Traditionally, lung cancer surgeries required large incisions and extended hospital stays. Today, thanks to robotic-assisted surgery, many patients can go home in one to two days, reflecting the precision and minimally invasive approach of the advanced technology.

The da Vinci Xi system offers advanced instrumentation and visualization, which makes the robot more favorable for lung surgery and other thoracic procedures. This technology supports a wide range of procedures at St. Luke's, including general, urologic, bariatric and gynecological surgeries. Led by St. Luke's Cardiothoracic Surgeon Garry Weide, DO, the lung surgery program offers patients the benefits of smaller incisions, faster recoveries and quicker returns to daily activities.

In addition to the surgical robot is the ION Endoluminal Robotic Bronchoscopy System at St. Luke's, which assists doctors in early-stage cancer diagnosis.

As Cedar Rapids' first hospital to adopt robotic technology two decades ago, St. Luke's has remained a leader in the field, setting new standards in patient care with a commitment to innovation and excellence. From rapid diagnostic biopsies to precise surgical interventions, these advancements empower patients with comprehensive, coordinated care for lung cancer and beyond.

**To find a list of surgeons who perform robot-assisted surgery at St. Luke's, visit [unitypoint.org/providers](https://unitypoint.org/providers).**



*da Vinci Xi system at St. Luke's*

## New Treatment for Afib

Electrophysiologists at St. Luke's Heart & Vascular Center are some of the first in the nation to use a new pulsed field ablation (PFA) system to treat atrial fibrillation (Afib), one of the most treated heart rhythm disorders in the United States. PFA uses high-energy electrical pulses to remove the heart tissue causing irregular heart rhythms. Traditional ablation uses heat or cold energy.

AFib occurs when the top two chambers of the heart beat too fast and with an irregular rhythm, which can decrease the heart's pumping efficiency. Symptoms may include fatigue, heart palpitations, trouble breathing and dizziness. Untreated, AFib can lead to a stroke.

**If you've been diagnosed with or have symptoms of AFib, ask your primary care provider for a referral to St. Luke's Heart Care Clinic or call (319) 364-7101.**



## Abbe Center Cedar Rapids is Moving to New Location

This summer, UnityPoint Health – AbbeHealth Services' Abbe Center for Community Mental Health, will relocate to 615 5th Street SE (formerly Stamats), increasing access to same-day mental health and substance abuse evaluations, crisis intervention, peer support, wellness recovery programs, group therapy and community outreach.

As Iowa's largest behavioral health provider and the state's first Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC), Abbe Center offers a comprehensive and coordinated approach, ensuring patients receive the right support at the right time. With the additional space and staff, the center can serve 30% more individuals annually, addressing our community's growing demand for behavioral health services.

The \$8 million project is supported by St. Luke's Foundation's New Beginnings Start Here capital campaign, including a \$1 million matching grant from The Hall-Perrine Foundation. To support the campaign or learn more, visit [give.unitypoint.org/mentalhealth](https://give.unitypoint.org/mentalhealth).

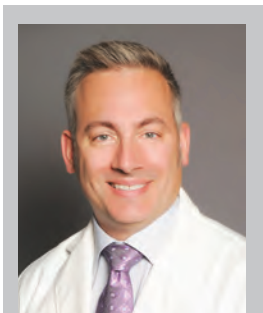


*Dick Southwick traveled to Cedar Rapids from Moline, Ill., because he needed advanced treatment from St. Luke's Vascular Surgery for a blocked leg artery. He looks forward to resuming metal sculpture work this summer.*

## MAN REGAINS MOBILITY, SAYS GOODBYE TO PAIN AFTER VASCULAR SURGERY

Dick Southwick of Moline, Ill., recently traveled to Cedar Rapids for vascular care. His cardiologist recommended UnityPoint Health – St. Luke's Vascular Surgery as the place to go for advanced treatment of a blockage in his leg. Without hesitation, he followed that advice and today his leg and foot are pain-free.

"I thought the pain in my foot was related to another condition I have," says 72-year-old Southwick. "I didn't realize I had a blockage in my leg until I saw my



David Lawrence, MD,  
PCI Vascular Surgeon,  
St. Luke's Vascular  
Surgery

cardiologist. I had a wound in my foot that wasn't healing because it wasn't getting circulation."

David Lawrence, MD, Physicians' Clinic of Iowa vascular surgeon with St. Luke's Vascular Surgery, saw Southwick early 2024, and after evaluation, recommended a leg bypass. He performed the procedure using a donor vein to bypass the blocked artery in Southwick's leg. Dr. Lawrence also discovered additional blockages that needed attention.

"We removed hard, calcified plaque in the femoral artery in the groin to prepare this artery for the bypass," Dr. Lawrence says. "In addition, Mr. Southwick had a blockage in his iliac artery, which brings blood through the pelvis to the leg. We placed a stent in

that artery to optimize the inflow of blood to his leg."

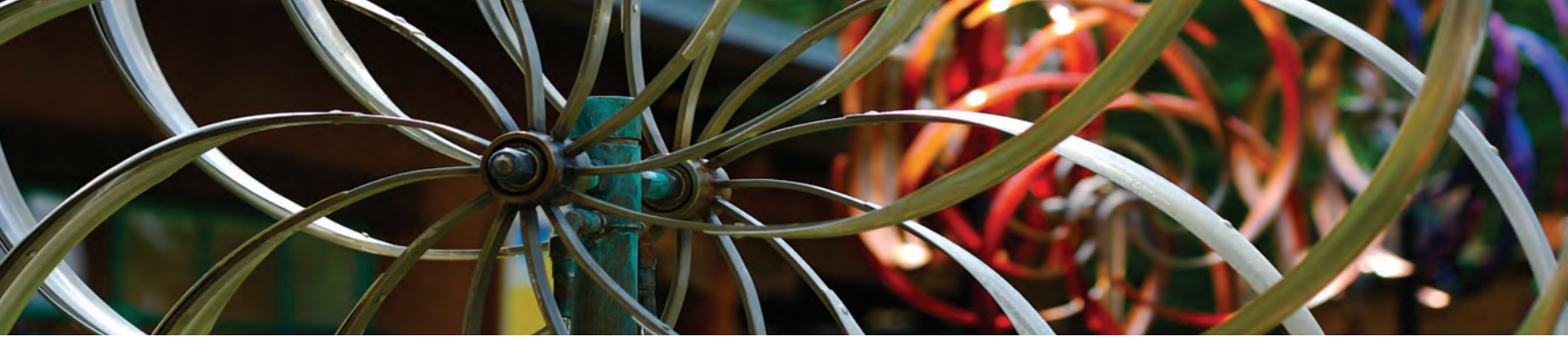
The ability to perform open bypass surgery in the same setting as placing stents is a hallmark of the advanced vascular care that can only be performed in a specialty center such as St. Luke's Vascular Surgery.

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***"It's important to be aware of your risk factors [for vascular problems], especially the 'big four' – know your family history, manage diabetes, keep your cholesterol in check and avoid using tobacco."  
- David Lawrence, MD***

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"I could tell the difference right away," says Southwick. "I was walking within two hours of the surgery and felt great."

### Minimally Invasive Vascular Procedure to the Rescue for Another Blockage

Unfortunately, a few months later, the bypass graft developed a blockage, but Dr. Lawrence and his team intervened again.

"We can restore blood flow through the bypass in a minimally invasive way through angioplasty and a special, lysis catheter," Dr. Lawrence says. "We direct the catheter through the bypass graft using X-ray guidance. The length of the catheter is perforated, and through it we deliver a medication that gently dissolves the clot and restores blood flow. Once that's complete, we take pictures of the graft to determine what caused the blockage and treat it to reduce the risk of it happening again."

Dr. Lawrence says Southwick was at significant risk of losing his foot had he not sought treatment.

"When people have pain at rest, that puts them in a category we refer to as critical limb ischemia," he says. "That differentiates them from patients who have blockages in their legs that only bother them with activity. Someone with critical limb ischemia may also have a sore on their foot that won't heal or

possible gangrene on the tip of a toe. It's important to be aware of your risk factors, especially the 'big four' - know your family history, manage diabetes, keep your cholesterol in check and avoid using tobacco."

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***"I was impressed with St. Luke's facility, their staff, and the communication. Dr. Lawrence was in touch with my local doctors all along. It was an all-around good experience."***  
***- Dick Southwick, patient***

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### Patient Numbers Growing: Third Surgeon, New Vascular Labs Accommodate

Today, Southwick says he feels great. He was recently outside splitting firewood, a task he said would have been extremely uncomfortable, if not impossible to do before surgery. He also looks forward to gardening in the spring and returning to his hobby of creating metal sculptures from recycled materials. Some, he says, have been more than 10 feet tall.

"I couldn't be happier with the care I received and the results," Southwick says. "I had a feeling of confidence from my first meeting with Dr. Lawrence. I was

impressed with St. Luke's facility, their staff, and the communication. Dr. Lawrence was in touch with my local doctors all along. It was an all-around good experience."

St. Luke's recently opened its new vascular and interventional radiology (IR) space, featuring new, state-of-the-art vascular and IR labs - part of its extensive Heart and Vascular Expansion. These labs will help meet the growing need for St. Luke's specialized services, such as imaging, biopsies, repair of aneurysms (ballooning vessels) and revascularization (restoring blood flow to blocked vessels). In addition, a third vascular surgeon joined St. Luke's Vascular Surgery last year, making St. Luke's uniquely positioned to provide modern vascular care for patients throughout the Cedar Rapids area - and beyond.

Read more about St. Luke's Heart and Vascular Expansion inside the front cover or scan the QR code to visit



**[uph.link/CR-HV-Expansion](https://uph.link/CR-HV-Expansion)**. To consult with a vascular surgeon, ask your primary care provider for a referral to St. Luke's Vascular Surgery.



*Former nurse Karen Ratz is once again able to enjoy retirement, thanks to a recent procedure at St. Luke's to treat her irregular heartbeats.*

## NURSE BECOMES PATIENT, FINDS QUICK FIX FOR ABNORMAL HEART RHYTHM

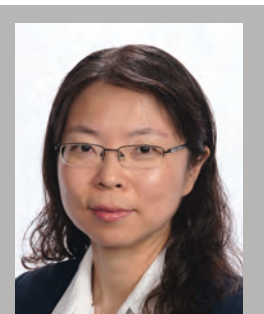
Karen Ratz, retired UnityPoint Health - St. Luke's Hospital nurse, was recently on the receiving end of care. The 60-year-old finished working at the hospital in summer 2023. However, she was back to visit a little over a year later as a patient, when she needed heart care.

As a healthcare professional, Ratz is diligent about visiting her primary care doctor. She had been seeing hers for irregular heartbeats. Over time, Ratz had more frequent occurrences, and her doctor referred her to Weiwei Li, MD, one of three electrophysiologists at St. Luke's Heart Care Clinic.

During visits with Dr. Li, Ratz underwent a thorough battery of diagnostic tests, including an echocardiogram and stress test. Dr. Li diagnosed Ratz with premature ventricular contractions (PVCs), extra heartbeats that begin in one of the heart's lower chambers. She started her on a series of medications, the first-line treatment for PVC.

Over the next few days, Ratz experienced dizziness, and required a couple of adjustments to her medicines. At one point, the dizziness wouldn't go away.

"It lasted for a good 50 minutes," Ratz describes. "I was working at a flu shot clinic, and I decided to go to St. Luke's ER. When I arrived, I was triaged and in a room within five minutes."



Weiwei Li, MD, PhD,  
Electrophysiologist,  
St. Luke's Heart Care  
Clinic



## New EP Lab Increases Patient Capacity

Tyler Rasmussen, MD, PhD, another St. Luke's electrophysiologist, was the on-call heart expert when Ratz visited the ER that day.

"For whatever reason, she wasn't tolerating the medicines," Dr. Rasmussen explains. "The medicines had failed to control her PVCs and were causing worrisome side effects. When this happens, the treatment of choice is ablation. We discussed all the options, and she chose to move forward with ablation."

A cardiac ablation is a procedure performed via catheter. It involves using a 3-D electroanatomical mapping system to provide a real-time picture of the heart's anatomy and electrical activity to pinpoint the area causing the irregular rhythm. The electrophysiology (EP) team then uses heat energy to create a tiny scar in the identified area of the heart muscle to prevent the abnormal rhythm from happening.

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***"Any patient who's been diagnosed with an irregular heart rhythm should meet with a cardiologist to discuss next steps."***

***- Tyler Rasmussen, MD, PhD***

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"Dr. Rasmussen was very good at explaining all the options, especially to my husband, who doesn't have a medical background," Ratz notes. "After

I decided on an ablation, he told me, 'now that we have two EP labs, I can get you in tomorrow.'"

## Patient's Heart Restored, Allows Her to Reclaim Her Retirement

Ratz spent one night in the hospital, had the ablation the next morning and was discharged the afternoon of her procedure. She raved about her stay.

"Everyone took great care of me, and there was such good communication," she shares. "Dr. Rasmussen explained the procedure thoroughly beforehand and answered all our questions. Heather (MacTaggart, ARNP, St. Luke's Heart Care Clinic) laid out my discharge plan and follow-up appointments. Madison, my nurse, went above and beyond. Without asking, she made a special trip

to get aspirin from the (inpatient) pharmacy before it closed, to save us from stopping on our way home. My husband tells everyone I was treated like a 'rock star' during my stay."

Although Dr. Rasmussen said there was no identifiable reason for Ratz's PVCs, he says there are several things that could bring them on. "All heart cells are excitable, meaning they can beat independently," he explains. "PVC means there's a spot in the heart that's outcompeting the person's normal conduction of electrical activity through the heart. Sometimes excessive alcohol can cause it, sedentary lifestyle or electrolyte imbalance.

"Patients with a cardiomyopathy (weak heart) are more likely to have

PVCs," Dr. Rasmussen continues. "The opposite can also be true - if PVCs are frequent enough, they can cause a weak heart muscle. Any patient who's been diagnosed with an irregular heart rhythm should meet with a cardiologist to discuss next steps. Many patients can go with clinical observation and lead a normal life, without any restrictions. Some may need further management to prevent or reverse the course of cardiomyopathy, especially if it interferes with their quality of life."

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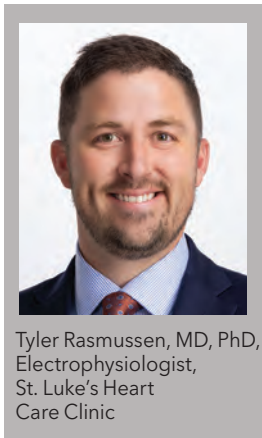
***"I am truly grateful for everyone involved in my care. Thank you for giving me my life back. It's time to enjoy retirement again!"***  
***- Karen Ratz, patient***

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That was the case for Ratz, but now she's back to enjoying her usual busy lifestyle, biking, golfing and walking, among other things. After being on the receiving end of care, she sent a letter to the hospital and heart team, writing, "I am truly grateful for everyone involved in my care. Thank you for giving me my life back. It's time to enjoy retirement again!"

If you or someone you love has been diagnosed with or is experiencing abnormal heart rhythms, contact St. Luke's Heart Care Clinic at

(319) 364-7101 to talk to a cardiologist. Learn more about St. Luke's - Cedar Rapids' Heart Hospital by scanning the QR code or visiting [uph.link/CR-Heart](https://uph.link/CR-Heart).



Tyler Rasmussen, MD, PhD,  
Electrophysiologist,  
St. Luke's Heart  
Care Clinic



*Mark and Karla Flannagan were preparing for a trip, when Mark experienced shortness of breath and chest pain. He went to St. Luke's Marion ER, where they arranged a transfer to St. Luke's Hospital for a heart cath and stent. The couple was still able to travel as planned.*

## ER Visit UNCOVERS HEART ISSUE JUST IN TIME FOR COUPLE'S ARIZONA TRIP

Mark Flannagan was helping his daughter Kara with a simple house project when she noticed he seemed out of breath. Mark went to the hardware store to grab project supplies. He and his wife, Karla, were set to leave the following day for an extended trip to Arizona and Kara was concerned.

"Kara called me and said, 'I know you and Dad are leaving tomorrow but his breathing is a little labored.' I replied I noted that too. I also felt like Mark seemed more tired than usual," recalls

Karla Flannagan. "Hearing someone else notice these things made it apparent he needed to address his health before we traveled."

When Mark returned from the store, they urged him to go to St. Luke's Marion ER to make sure his symptoms weren't something more serious.

"I remember telling Karla, 'We are leaving tomorrow,'" explains Mark. "And she said, 'We might still be leaving tomorrow but it would be best to get checked and have peace

of mind.' Our daughter mentioned St. Luke's opened an ER in Marion, so that's where we went."

### **Expert Care Around the Clock at St. Luke's Marion ER**

St. Luke's Marion ER opened in August 2024. It's located at 3301 Armar Drive, which is just off Marion Blvd. and near Highway 100. It's a full-service ER, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days per year. It is staffed by board-certified emergency medicine providers from



East Central Iowa Acute Care, who also serve St. Luke's Cedar Rapids ER, along with a dedicated team of nurses, patient care technicians and other healthcare professionals.

"The care at St. Luke's Marion ER was terrific," says Karla. "We walked in, and they took Mark to a room immediately and worked to identify what was going on with him."

"Mark presented to St. Luke's Marion ER with exceptional chest pain and fatigue," says Emma Wandro, DO, St. Luke's ER. "We recommended he be sent to St. Luke's Hospital for further cardiac work-up."

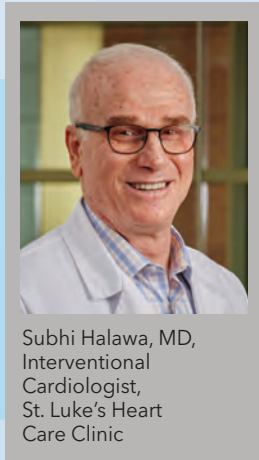
### From the ER to Heart Care: Comprehensive Medical Support

"They determined he was not having a heart attack, which was a relief to hear," shares Karla. "While we were glad to receive this news, we didn't want to leave for Arizona without getting the full picture of what was going on with Mark. We didn't want to be nearly two-thousand miles away from family or our local hospital if something serious developed later."

"My father died at 61 from a massive heart attack," shares Mark. "Because of this family history I have worked with my doctor to keep close tabs on my health. I have been treated for high cholesterol for about 30 years. I have also had various heart tests through the years. However, this time, I was having more intermittent chest pain, shortness of breath and fatigue."

St. Luke's Marion ER team worked to transfer Mark to St. Luke's Hospital where it was determined he would have a heart catheterization procedure.

"Because of Mark's persistent symptoms, previous testing and family history we decided to proceed with a heart catheterization procedure," says Subhi Halawa, MD, St. Luke's Heart Care Clinic interventional cardiologist. "During this procedure we use something called IFR (instantaneous wave-free ratio), which identifies how much a blockage in the heart's arteries is affecting blood flow. It helps us determine if this blockage needs to be fixed with a stent or not. Mark had a lot of calcium build-up (blockage) in his blood vessels, and we placed a stent."



Subhi Halawa, MD,  
Interventional  
Cardiologist,  
St. Luke's Heart  
Care Clinic

"I had a significant blockage in my left anterior descending artery (LAD), which is referred to as the widowmaker," shares Mark. "I feel fortunate it was identified before I had a heart attack and suffered heart damage."

"The LAD is the main descending vessel that supplies almost 50 percent of the blood to the heart," explains Dr. Halawa. "When it is blocked, even partially like it was in Mark's case, it can significantly affect the heart's ability to function properly. It can result in death, but in Mark's case, we caught it early and were able to fix it."

Mark stayed one night at St. Luke's Hospital. He and Karla were able to take their long-awaited trip out west thanks to the peace of mind he had after

receiving care at Cedar Rapids' Heart Hospital.

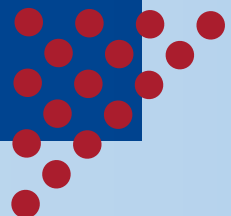
"Everything was taken care of quickly," shares Karla. "From our visit to St. Luke's Marion ER, to the transfer to St. Luke's Hospital and Mark's heart procedure, no matter what it was - whether it was housekeeping, the nurses or doctors - we couldn't have had a better experience all the way around. They were efficient, kind and welcoming. Mark was in and out of the hospital in 24 hours. We had a wonderful experience at St. Luke's. We were impressed."

Now back from Arizona the couple shares they were able to hike five to 12 miles a day. They are grateful for the exceptional care Mark received, which allowed them to enjoy their trip without reservation, knowing he had received world-class care close to home.

**If you need  
emergency care,  
there are now  
TWO St. Luke's ER  
locations - in Cedar  
Rapids and NOW  
in Marion.**

**CEDAR RAPIDS ER**  
1026 A Ave., NE  
(319) 369-7105

**MARION ER**  
3301 Armar Dr.  
(319) 451-2700





*Barb Schemmel is once again walking and enjoying family hikes, thanks to two robotic knee replacements in two years at St. Luke's.*

Once limited by severe arthritis in both knees, Barb Schemmel's life has been transformed thanks to two knee replacement surgeries in two years. These procedures not only relieved significant pain but also restored her ability to embrace life's adventures, from family hikes to recently walking six miles in New York City during a visit to welcome her newest grandchild.

For years, Schemmel's knee issues crept up on her, gradually intensifying. However, after tearing her meniscus twice in the last decade, she sought help from

Matthew White, MD, orthopedic surgeon at Physicians' Clinic of Iowa (PCI). Dr. White delivered the news it wasn't just the meniscus injury causing her pain. She had severe arthritis, no cartilage, and her knees were bone-on-bone. Such a loss of cushion was causing severe pain.

Initially hoping for a simpler solution, Schemmel tried cortisone injections, which provided only temporary relief. The pain returned within weeks, accompanied by the realization a knee replacement was inevitable.

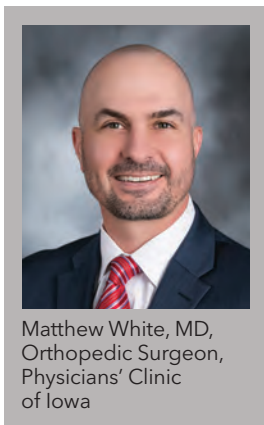
"At the time, I was 67 and thought, 'I'm too young to be dropped off at the front of the store because I can't walk far,'" Schemmel explains. "I wanted to be able to do things with my adult children and grandkids and that meant I needed knee replacement surgery."

"As people age, they want to remain active," Dr. White explains. "Patients with arthritis want a better quality of life and therefore they are more aggressive about pursuing joint replacement. It is a successful surgery with a high patient satisfaction rate. It is important to seek



# REGAINING LIFE AFTER KNEE REPLACEMENT

out surgeons and facilities that do a high volume of joint replacement to ensure the best results. At PCI, our surgeons perform more joint replacement surgeries than any other group in Iowa."



## Same-day Joint Replacement Surgery at St. Luke's

In 2022, Schemmel underwent her first knee replacement at St. Luke's, confident in both her decision and the expertise of the highly skilled surgical team. Surgeons use the cutting-edge ROSA robotic system at St. Luke's.

"The ROSA system enhances precision during surgery, ensuring better alignment and balance in the joint," says Dr. White. "It's like moving from hand-measured tools to millimeter-precise calculations. The goal is to create a more balanced knee, which leads to better outcomes and potentially longer-lasting results."

Schemmel went home the same day as her surgery. She says physical therapy played a pivotal role in her recovery.

"If you don't commit to therapy, it's a tough road," Barb says. With the guidance of Molly Bailey at St. Luke's Therapy Plus, she rebuilt her strength and mobility. "Molly encouraged me to push myself while reminding me to be patient. Recovery is a process, and you must give yourself grace.

A year after surgery, I was walking, hiking, and doing things I hadn't enjoyed in years."

Inspired by her success, Schemmel scheduled her second knee replacement at St. Luke's a year later.

"All PCI surgeons and the St. Luke's surgical team strive to provide timely and efficient care," says Dr. White. "Once a patient decides on joint replacement, we aim to avoid long wait times for surgery. Our focus is on restoring quality of life and helping patients return to living fully, free from joint pain."

Schemmel reports her second knee replacement surgery was as successful as the first.

"Previously, a family hike would leave me icing my knees for days. Now, I can walk uneven trails and keep up with my grandkids without pain," Schemmel shares. "Before my surgeries I would have never been able to do all the walking we did when we were in New York."

## Guidance for Others

Schemmel acknowledges knee replacement requires effort but emphasizes its benefits.

"It's not an instant fix, but it's worth it if you want to stay active and enhance your quality of life," she adds. "Trust the process, stay dedicated to therapy, and give it time."

"The use of spinal anesthesia, cryotherapy, and minimally invasive techniques helps make the surgery and recovery more manageable," explains Dr. White. "Modern joint replacement is incredibly successful,

with most patients experiencing significant pain relief and a return to their usual activity within months. By three months, many are walking comfortably, resuming daily activities and eventually getting back to sports like pickleball or golf."

## Embracing Life

Today, Schemmel is thriving, embracing life with a renewed sense of freedom.

"I feel fantastic," she shares. "These surgeries gave me the ability to enjoy life again. Whether it's hiking, playing with my grandkids, or simply walking without pain, I've regained so much."

For anyone facing similar struggles, Schemmel offers hope.

"If you're suffering and ready to get back to being active, this could be a wonderful solution. Just give yourself time, and don't be afraid to ask for help."

Scan the QR code or visit [uph.link/Orthopedics\\_CR](https://uph.link/Orthopedics_CR) to learn more about Cedar Rapids' trusted orthopedics hospital and find a list of surgeons who perform joint replacement surgery at St. Luke's.







# GRATEFUL HEART: LOCAL GALLERY OWNER REUNITES WITH LIFESAVING SURGEONS

*Apple Creek Gallery Owner Scott Wiley (center) recently reunited with UnityPoint Health - St. Luke's Cardiothoracic Surgeons Garry Weide, DO (left), and James Levett, MD, to thank them for saving his life. Wiley required open heart surgery to replace a leaking heart valve, which was causing severe anemia.*



Scott Wiley, 68, owner of Apple Creek Gallery in Cedar Rapids, always hoped he'd have a chance to thank the doctors who performed his open heart surgery. When he casually mentioned it to UnityPoint Health - St. Luke's Hospital team members working with him on a framing project, they coordinated a time for him to meet cardiothoracic surgeons Garry Weide, DO, and James Levett, MD.

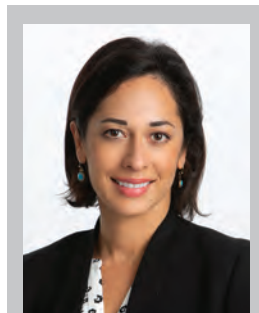
"I was incredibly excited to meet them," Wiley shares. "They were so gracious. Meeting them under different circumstances has been a goal of mine since my operation. I wanted to find some way to thank them."

Wiley was born with a severely regurgitating mitral heart valve, which means the valve doesn't close properly, allowing blood to flow backward into the left atrium of the heart. He lived with the condition without incident until, in 2014 during a routine physical, his doctor noted a heart murmur and referred him to St. Luke's Heart Care Clinic. He began to regularly see Cardiologist Keith Kopec, MD, who monitored and treated him for several years. In December 2021, Wiley's condition progressed, and he went to another hospital for a mitral valve repair. However, the outcome wasn't what he'd hoped.

"I came home and proceeded to get sicker than I'd ever been in my life," Wiley recalls. "My urine was the color of cola;

I was losing weight daily and bleeding internally."

Wiley then scheduled an appointment back with Dr. Kopec, who suggested they involve another cardiologist at the clinic, Laila Payvandi, MD, who specializes in advanced imaging. She reviewed images of Wiley's newly repaired valve and determined there were three sutures leaking.



Laila A Payvandi, MD,  
Cardiologist, St. Luke's  
Heart Care Clinic

"We used a combination of two-dimensional and three-dimensional echo imaging to highlight the problem with Mr. Wiley's mitral valve repair," Dr. Payvandi describes. "The blood was leaking from the valve at such velocity, it was damaging his red blood cells. That caused him to become significantly anemic and require transfusions. It was clear he needed surgery to repair the problem."

### Collaborative Effort Restores Heart Health, Improves Quality of Life

Drs. Kopec and Payvandi consulted with Dr. Weide and scheduled Wiley for surgery. Ultimately, Dr. Weide replaced Wiley's mitral valve with a tissue valve from a pig.

"Our goal was twofold," explains Dr. Weide. "The idea was to replace the valve so it was no longer leaking and also stop the anemia he was suffering from the damage to his red blood cells. The advantage of a tissue valve over a mechanical valve is it does not require blood thinners. Given the fact he was quite

anemic, we wanted to avoid putting him on blood thinners because of potential blood loss."

Today, Wiley said he feels better than ever. He is celebrating life and has adopted a positive outlook. He enjoys spending time with his sisters, who he says are his best friends, and looks forward to seeing his new great-nephew grow up. He feels grateful for the collaboration between Drs. Kopec and Payvandi in finding the problem with his heart, and says he owes his life to them and Drs. Weide and Levett.

"This whole experience has changed me," he reports. "I've intensified my lifestyle of eating clean, no smoking, no drinking and exercising. I'm happy I'm here today and can share my story. I have St. Luke's doctors to thank for that. They saved my life."

UnityPoint Health - St. Luke's is Cedar Rapids' Heart Hospital. For more than 47 years, St. Luke's has pioneered heart and vascular care in the community, introducing the most advanced procedures available, so there's no need to travel outside of Cedar Rapids for care.

See why St. Luke's is the area's heart care leader by scanning the QR code or visiting [uph.link/CRHeartCareCompared](https://uph.link/CRHeartCareCompared).

To connect with a cardiologist, call St. Luke's Heart Care Clinic at (319) 364-7101.



## HOW DO PATIENTS BENEFIT FROM THE ST. LUKE'S AND LINN COUNTY ANESTHESIOLOGISTS PARTNERSHIP?

Linn County Anesthesiologists, PC (LCA), the area's only anesthesiology practice, is now exclusively working with UnityPoint Health - St. Luke's Hospital.

This collaboration ensures safe and effective care during surgeries and supports acute pain management following procedures at St. Luke's Hospital and Surgery Center Cedar Rapids, which is associated with the hospital.

LCA's specialized expertise aligns with St. Luke's nationally recognized surgical program, further enhancing patient care. Together, the organizations are strengthening and growing St. Luke's surgical services.

"This relationship is a great benefit to our patients, and we are thrilled this group of highly-skilled and specially trained anesthesiologists chose to exclusively partner with us," says Casey Greene, UnityPoint Health - Cedar Rapids President. "This collaboration reflects our commitment to delivering exceptional healthcare and ensures patients in our community have continued access to innovative and high-quality surgical care right here in Cedar Rapids."



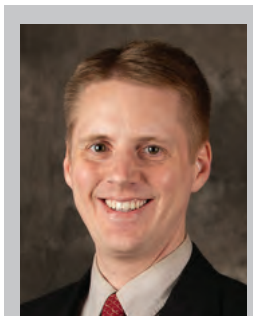
Casey Greene,  
President, UnityPoint  
Health - Cedar Rapids

"Linn County Anesthesiologists is excited about this opportunity to collaborate with St. Luke's, a



An anesthesiologist from Linn County Anesthesiologists, PC ensures safe and effective care during a surgery at St. Luke's. This exclusive partnership strengthens St. Luke's nationally recognized surgical program, enhancing patient outcomes and supporting innovative surgical care in Cedar Rapids.

healthcare provider that shares our commitment to advancing surgical care," says Scott LeGrand, MD, president of Linn County Anesthesiologists, PC. "St. Luke's provides the ideal setting to enhance the care we deliver because of its nationally recognized program and cutting-edge surgical suites. This collaboration ensures Cedar Rapids remains a leader in specialized surgical care."



Scott LeGrand, MD,  
President, Linn County  
Anesthesiologists, PC

Beyond surgeries. LCA also provides services at St. Luke's Pain Clinic and

epidurals at St. Luke's Birth Care Center, which is known as the Cedar Rapids baby hospital because four out of five moms welcome their baby at St. Luke's. Expectant mothers can trust they'll continue to receive the highest level of care during their delivery.

Together, St. Luke's and LCA are raising the bar for anesthesia and surgical care in the region, ensuring patients receive safe, effective and innovative treatment at every stage.

Scan the QR code to learn about the many other ways St. Luke's invests in community healthcare, or go to [uph.link/StLukes\\_CR](https://uph.link/StLukes_CR).





## AQUATIC THERAPY NOW AVAILABLE AT ST. LUKE'S

St. Luke's Hospital Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R) now offers aquatic therapy to patients recovering from injuries and illnesses, thanks to the generosity of St. Luke's Foundation donors.

A lead gift from The Hall Perrine Foundation, and other significant gifts totaling nearly \$300,000, allowed St. Luke's Foundation to acquire the HydroWorx® Rise. The equipment features a freestanding warm-water tank with a self-contained underwater treadmill. It uses water's natural buoyancy to support patients—including

individuals who are confined to a wheelchair—while they stand, walk and even run.

HydroWorx is a significant therapy tool, which will greatly enhance patient recovery. Using the power of water, the device safely reduces body weight, promoting natural walking movements for quicker recovery and reduced pain.

For more information about St. Luke's Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, visit [uph.link/CR-PhysicalMedicineRehab](https://uph.link/CR-PhysicalMedicineRehab) or ask your primary care provider for a referral.



A patient receives therapy with St. Luke's new HydroWorx® Rise underwater treadmill.

## TREATMENT AVAILABLE FOR PATIENTS WITH BONE DISORDERS

The Bone Clinic at UnityPoint Clinic – Endocrinology, Diabetes Center and Healthy Living Clinic treats patients who have metabolic bone disorders, low bone mass, thinning bone tissue or people who are at risk for these conditions.

The specialists at the Bone Clinic develop individualized plans, using a holistic approach. Treatment includes a bone density scan, nutrition coaching, exercise, lifestyle changes and fall prevention education, as well as supplements and medication as needed.

Common bone disorders treated through the Bone Clinic include bursitis, fibrous dysplasia, fractures, gout, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis and scoliosis. (Learn more about these and other bone conditions at [uph.link/CR-BoneClinic](https://uph.link/CR-BoneClinic)).

Certain conditions, such as celiac's disease, hyper/hypoparathyroidism or a phosphorus or vitamin D deficiency, can predispose you to bone problems. If you have been diagnosed with a bone disorder or have a condition that puts you at increased risk, **ask your primary care provider for a referral to the Bone Clinic.**

## A BETTER PLACE TO BE: COMING BACK TO UNITYPOINT HEALTH

At St. Luke's, we pride ourselves on being a great place to work. The people, culture and opportunities for career growth and development all play a role in creating an exceptional workplace. This year, we've seen these efforts reaffirmed in our hiring numbers. In 2024, 135 team members who previously worked at St. Luke's and departed for other opportunities made the choice to return. Fifty-one were nurses.

Two employees who rejoined St. Luke's included Kara Flack, director of Quality, Safety & Patient Experience, and Karla Pizarik, manager of Volunteer Services. Flack returned because she missed the environment.

She says, "In my personal experience, there is no place that has a culture like St. Luke's. There are great people here who truly want to make a positive impact. With hard work and dedication, your opportunities are endless."

Pizarik says she missed the people and familiarity. "Returning to St. Luke's felt like 'coming home,'" she shares.

If you or someone you know is looking for a rewarding career in a welcoming environment where you matter, visit [uph.link/JoinOurTeam](https://uph.link/JoinOurTeam) to search for openings today!



Kara Flack



Karla Pizarik

We apologize for mailing problems such as duplicate copies. If you have questions or concerns about LiveWell magazine, please call (319) 369-7395 or email [stlukescr@unitypoint.org](mailto:stlukescr@unitypoint.org).



**ST. LUKE'S HOSPITAL** was named the **#1 HOSPITAL** in **IOWA** according to Newsweek/Statista Best-in-State Hospital's list. This honor places St. Luke's as a top hospital in the nation and highlights our commitment to high-quality healthcare.

**Congratulations** to our team members, providers, board members, patients, community and many others who helped us achieve this **national designation**.

Rankings were determined based on the following data:

- Quality metrics from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)
- American Hospital Association (AHA) Annual Survey of Hospitals Database
- Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) patient experience surveys
- Voluntary PROMs (Patient-Reported Outcome Measures) implementation survey

Learn more about joining a top-ranked team.



[joinuph.com](http://joinuph.com)

