

# Helping the heart



Terry Hagmeier is able to enjoy fishing after a heart procedure.

Terry Hagmeier just didn't have the energy to go hunting and fishing anymore. This was highly unusual because it's something the 62-year-old Cedar Rapids man loved to do.

"I used to be quite an avid hunter, but it got to the point where I just couldn't walk very far without being out of breath," said Hagmeier. "I would also get light-headed once in a while and black out."

These episodes led Hagmeier to visit his family doctor who referred him to Todd Langager, MD, a cardiologist at Cardiologists, L.C.

"Terry's an individual who had an enlarged and a weak heart," said Dr. Langager. "He also had a pacemaker implanted several years earlier. When you have a weak, enlarged heart and a pacemaker the electrical signals of the heart sometimes cause the heart to get abnormally activated. So I put in a new pacemaker and added a third wire to it, which restored the heart's electrical activity to a normal rhythm. This resulted in a significant improvement in Terry's symptoms. In fact he felt improvement within 24 hours of this procedure."

## Cardiac resynchronization therapy

The procedure Dr. Langager performed on Hagmeier is called cardiac resynchronization therapy. This is performed on patients with heart failure due to abnormal pumping in the heart's ventricles. The heart's ventricles are supposed to

contract at the same time, but in many patients with heart failure, they may beat out of sync. Because this treatment resets the ventricles' pumping mechanism, it's referred to as cardiac resynchronization therapy.

"We actually took out Terry's old pacemaker and inserted a defibrillator to

protect him against a potentially dangerous heart rhythm problem," said Dr. Langager. "At the same time I upgraded the pacemaker part of the defibrillator with an extra wire to provide the benefits of cardiac resynchronization therapy."

The benefits of this therapy include improved quality of life, increased exercise capacity and reduction in hospitalization for heart failure.

"We are starting to perform more cardiac resynchronization therapy on patients in part because the number of individuals with congestive heart failure is growing," said Dr. Langager. "It is not for everyone. To be considered the individual has to have a weak heart, be on stable heart medications and not achieving benefits from these measures."

According to Dr. Langager this procedure is more effective than medication, potentially strengthens the heart and makes individuals feel better, but it cannot be used as a first line therapy – medications must be tried first. Approximately two-thirds of patients who have this therapy see mild to marked improvement.

Cardiac resynchronization therapy is a minor surgical procedure lasting two to three hours. A small incision is made under the collar bone, the patient is sedated and a local anesthetic is used. This allows for a faster recovery and usually an overnight stay in a private room is only needed.

"I have nothing but good things to say about St. Luke's," said Hagmeier. "The doctors, nurses and other hospital staff were more than kind and concerned about my health and well-being during my hospital stay."

## Changed life

Following surgery Hagmeier had few limitations. The only thing he couldn't do is have a magnetic body scan – also called an MRI. He also has to get periodic check-ups with Dr. Langager to make sure the device is working properly, and those can be done from his home or an occasional trip to Cardiologists, L.C.

"Before surgery Terry was very limited in what he could do," said Dr. Langager. "He was dissatisfied with his inability to walk as far as he wanted or climb stairs. He would get out of breath and have to stop and rest. After the procedure he showed significant improvement. In fact, he told me he was 100 percent improved."

"I don't remember anything about the procedure," said Hagmeier. "All I know is when I woke up – I felt like a new guy. It has changed my life completely. I could breathe easier; I just immediately felt better. I am so glad I went ahead and had this surgery – if I hadn't I probably wouldn't be here. I feel I can do anything I want to do right now."

And with spring in the air one of the things Hagmeier will sure to be doing now that he's feeling better is fishing somewhere in eastern Iowa.

■ To learn more about this procedure visit [stlukescr.org](http://stlukescr.org) or call St. Luke's Heart Care Services at 319/369-7941.



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Todd Langager, MD, cardiologist  
Cardiologists, L.C.