

Home is where his heart is

Olathe Mayor finds world-class cardiac care close to home.

When Mike Copeland and his family discovered he needed complex cardiac surgery, they wanted to go to the best – immediately thinking Mayo Clinic or Cleveland Clinic. Then they discovered the best was in their own backyard.

“I have a voracious appetite for data,” said the four-term mayor of Olathe. “My research showed in all outcomes that matter most, like mortality or infection rates, The University of Kansas Hospital had identical or even better results. Everything else was based on reputation.”

Staying near home was vital since Mike and his wife, Maria, are on the run with a hyper-busy family of Olivia, 14, Abby, 12 and Joshua, 7. “We would have made traveling work,” said Maria. “But I would have been alone far from home, wondering how my kids were. I wouldn’t have been able to focus on Mike.”

A complex surgery may become more complex

Mike, 52, had no inkling of heart trouble until his physician detected a murmur and insisted on an echocardiogram. The test revealed he had been born with a faulty aortic valve, and over time that valve calcified, leading to aortic stenosis. Without surgery, this condition could be fatal.

The Copelands turned to Gregory Muehlbach, MD, cardiothoracic surgeon. Since Mike’s heart had been pumping so hard for so long, Dr. Muehlbach found his ascending aorta and aortic root needed repair, as well.

Now, one surgery would involve three major procedures.

Dr. Muehlbach also prepared the Copelands for the likelihood that Mike would require an additional, relatively rare procedure: deep hypothermic circulatory arrest. Mike’s temperature would be drastically lowered with no breathing, no heartbeat and no brain activity.

Healthcare the way it’s meant to be

The possibility of this procedure scared Maria the most. When the nurse came out to tell her that Dr. Muehlbach had found a way to avoid it, “that’s when I lost it,” she said.

As a result, Mike was in surgery for five hours instead of the expected 10, making his recovery faster, easier and less risky.

Indeed, Maria recorded a video message from him to his children at 7 p.m. that night, and he was working part-time four weeks later. “I cannot tell you how thankful we are,” said Maria. “This is what healthcare is supposed to be.” ■

Investing in the future of patient care

Four years ago, Mid-America Cardiology and MidAmerica Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgeons made history at The University of Kansas Hospital as the first practices to start an endowment fund. Since then, more than 100 employees, patients and family members have donated to the fund, which benefits programs at the Center for Advanced Heart Care.

This year, the fund earned and disbursed nearly \$60,000, providing video and teleconferencing equipment for all clinics and offices. Physicians at the main campus or any other office can now conduct detailed consultations with patients at a different location. The consultation is more immediate as well, since there’s no need to schedule an additional appointment. Funds also supported continuing education for professionals with the practices.

To make a gift to the Center for Advanced Heart Care, call Caroline McKnight at 913-945-5726.



The Copelands: Mike, Abby, Olivia, Joshua and Maria, with family dog, Lucky.

To learn more about cardiac care at The University of Kansas Hospital, visit kumed.com or call 913-588-1227.

Olathe Mayor Mike Copeland just four months after complex cardiac surgery.

