

## New Heart Pumps New Life into 49-year-old

By [Janet Reid](#)

On Valentine's Day, while you may have been munching on candy hearts or your kids may have been cutting hearts out of red paper, Lawrence resident Chuck Chapman had a new heart beating inside his chest.

"It's incredible," Chapman said less than a week after being released from St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, Mo. "The gift of organ donation is such an incredible, outstanding gift."

It's a gift that came on Chapman's 49th birthday, Feb. 13, nine months to the day after he suffered a massive heart attack.

"What happened to me is what they term a widow-maker," Chapman said. "I was just lucky to live through that." Chapman, who works as a grower at a wholesale greenhouse in Linwood, said he had very few of the typical symptoms of an impending heart attack. He went to bed the night of May 12 but had trouble falling asleep. By the next morning, he felt immense pressure in his chest, had difficulty breathing and immediately drove himself the roughly five blocks from his home to Lawrence Memorial Hospital.

"If I had an inkling sooner, I could've gotten to the hospital sooner, and maybe this would not have turned into such a major event that it did," he said.

The heart attack left Chapman with major organ damage, what doctors classified as chronic heart failure, and he was eventually placed on the transplant list.

To buy Chapman more time, doctors placed a pump inside his body that basically did the work that his failing heart was supposed to be doing.

"It pumped about seven liters of blood every minute, which is basically everything in your body," he said. "These systems have evolved from something that you push around with you that's about the size of a dishwasher, to what I had."

For two months, Chapman wore a small controller on his belt and carried a battery pack like a backpack. The unit had to be attached 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

All the while, he grew stronger until, on Feb. 9, doctors elevated Chapman to the top of the transplant list. A few days later his call came from St. Luke's Mid America Heart Institute.

"About 8 p.m., I got the phone call from the transplant clinic saying, 'Mr. Chapman, we have a suitable donor heart if you want to accept it, it's here,'" he said.

As the dawn of his birthday arrived, Chapman received the best present he could've asked for: a new heart and a new lease on life.

“I just can’t believe it,” he said. “I almost feel back to my old self ... and I have an excellent prognosis. I could have easily died back in May, and I think it’s more than a coincidence that I was given a second chance.”

Chapman’s surgeon said the five-hour surgery went well, although he cautioned that there is no such thing as a “routine” heart transplant.

“He has literally blossomed, since he has felt better,” said Dr. Michael Borkon of the Mid America Heart Institute. “His prognosis is absolutely excellent. Once he’s recovered, he’ll have no restrictions.”

Now, less than a month into his recovery, which is expected to take at least a year, Chapman is already working to spread the word about the importance of being an organ donor.

According to the Gift of Life Foundation, more than 106,000 people are awaiting transplants and 7,000 people died last year without receiving the organs they needed.

Chapman considers himself one of the lucky ones.

“What an incredible gift and, for it to have fallen on my birthday, it’s pretty amazing.”

His doctors agree.

“Many of these patients will celebrate two birthdays — their birthday and their re-birth day,” Dr. Borkon said. “What are the chances? I think he needs to play the lottery.”