

Healthy

Summer 2026

COMMUNITY

Comedian, actor

*David
Alan
Grier*

This Issue:
**Focus on
Everyday
Wellness**

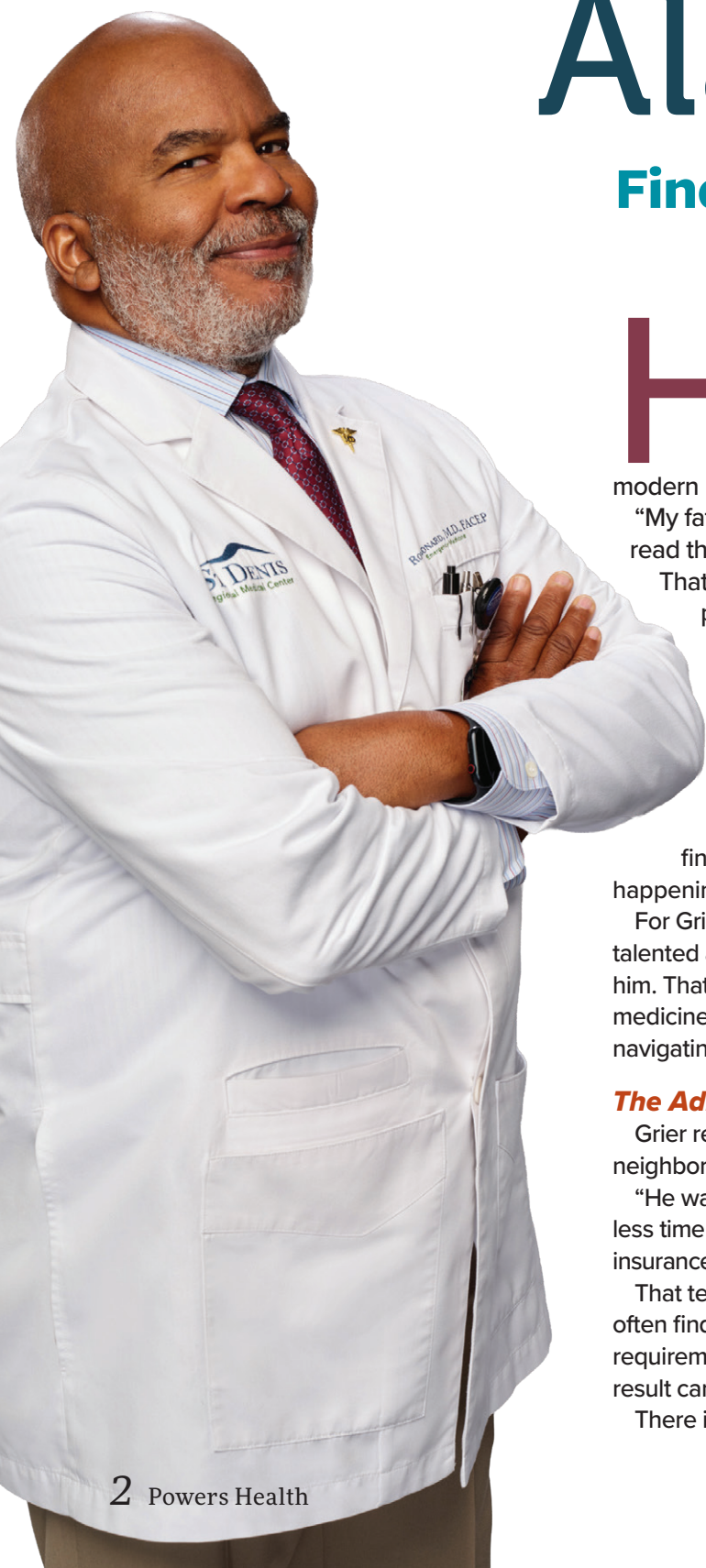


Powers
HEALTHSM



David Alan Grier

Finding the HUMAN Side of Healthcare



Hospitals are not usually the backdrop for comedy. They are places of urgency, responsibility and relentless decision-making. But for David Alan Grier, stepping into the role of Dr. Ron in NBC's hit TV show *St. Denis Medical* is not about poking fun at medicine. It is about reflecting the reality of modern healthcare in a way that feels honest and deeply human.

"My father was a doctor," Grier says. "He was a psychiatrist. So, when I read this character, there was something familiar there."

That familiarity shaped his portrayal of a physician navigating the pressures that so many providers face today.

What drew you to play a physician in this setting?

Dr. Ron works in a hospital that feels stretched thin, both financially and emotionally. Staffing shortages, administrative burdens and limited resources are not exaggerated for television. They are daily realities in many healthcare settings.

"There's comedy in reality," Grier explains. "Most hospitals are financially stretched. So, it's just playing what really would be happening in a hospital setting."

For Grier, the appeal was not just the humor but the authenticity. Dr. Ron is talented and experienced, but he also is worn down by the system around him. That balance mirrors the experience of many physicians who entered medicine to care for patients but now spend increasing amounts of time navigating paperwork and operational demands.

The Administrative Burden of Medicine

Grier recalls a documentary about a physician who returned to his own neighborhood to open a clinic for underserved families.

"He wanted to practice medicine," Grier says. "But, day by day, he spent less time with patients and more time filling out forms and dealing with insurance."

That tension resonates strongly in today's healthcare landscape. Physicians often find themselves balancing clinical care with documentation requirements, reimbursement systems and administrative oversight. The result can be frustration, fatigue and burnout.

There is a clear thread of that reality in Dr. Ron.

“He’s a really talented doctor,” Grier says. “He sees himself in some of the younger staff, especially Alex. She has a family and she’s excellent at her job. But the job takes too much of her time.”

Dr. Ron recognizes the cost of that imbalance. He sacrificed his personal life for his career and now attempts to mentor others so they can avoid the same outcome. The show does not ignore burnout. It brings it to the surface in a way that feels relatable rather than clinical.

Why Humor Matters in Healthcare

Healthcare is serious work. Lives are on the line, but humor always has been part of hospital culture.

“It’s human nature,” Grier says. “I don’t care what your job is. People are going to find humor because it’s what we do.”

Within high stress environments, humor becomes a coping mechanism. It builds camaraderie among staff and provides relief during long shifts. In many ways, it is part of resilience. “Sometimes you’re thinking something at work that you can’t say,” Grier adds. “We’re voicing that stuff.”

The show captures the inner thoughts that healthcare professionals may recognize but rarely express openly. It sheds light on access to care, staffing strain and patient trust without losing compassion for those working within the system.

Getting the Details Right

Healthcare professionals have been quick to weigh in on the show’s realism.

“We got a message from someone in healthcare who said, ‘We love the show. It’s so real. You’re hitting all the right notes,’” Grier says.

The viewer’s only complaint was about the stethoscopes being too expensive for most hospitals to afford.

“That’s healthcare nerd stuff,” Grier laughs. “But it shows they’re paying attention.”

That level of scrutiny is a compliment. It signals that the series is resonating with those who understand the intricacies of clinical life.

Relationships and Continuity of Care

In many community hospitals, relationships between providers and patients span years. While Dr. Ron’s long-term patient continuity has not yet been fully explored, the show highlights another enduring relationship: the physician’s bond with the institution itself.

“The longest relationship he probably has is with the hospital,” Grier says. “It’s dysfunctional. It’s complicated. But it’s loyal.”

Healthcare providers often form deep attachments to the organizations they serve, even when systems are imperfect. That loyalty can coexist with frustration. It is a complex dynamic the show portrays with nuance.

What do you hope healthcare professionals feel when they watch?

Grier is clear about his hope. “I hope they laugh hard and laugh long,” he says. “But I hope those laughs are earned.”

For physicians, nurses and hospital staff, the show offers something beyond entertainment. It offers recognition.

“They deal with burnout. They deal with paperwork. They deal with all of it,” he says. “If they can watch and feel seen, that matters.”

St. Denis Medical does not minimize the challenges facing healthcare. Instead, it acknowledges them through storytelling that balances humor with empathy. It reminds audiences that behind every chart and diagnosis is a person navigating the same pressures and imperfections as everyone else.

In the end, Grier believes the show does two things at once. It entertains and it honors.

“It reminds you that you’re human,” he says.

In healthcare, that reminder may be more important than ever. ■

Healthy Summers Start with Prevention

As we head into the summer months, many of us look forward to more activity, more connection and more time outdoors. It’s also the perfect moment to check in on your health – and your primary care provider is the best place to start.

Your primary care provider (PCP) is your partner in prevention. They’re the person who knows your health history, understands your goals and helps you stay ahead of potential problems. Routine visits, recommended screenings and honest conversations with your provider can catch concerns early, long before they become something more serious. Prevention isn’t about expecting bad news. It’s about protecting what’s going well and making sure you can keep enjoying the moments that matter most.

At Powers Health, we believe primary care should be easy to access and simple to prioritize. This summer, consider scheduling that annual checkup, asking the questions you’ve been putting off or talking with your provider about ways to support your long-term wellness. Small steps – taken consistently – can make a big difference.

Your PCP is here to guide you, support you and help you stay healthy for the years ahead. Investing in that relationship is one of the most powerful things you can do for yourself and your family.

Need a primary care provider? Visit PowersHealth.org/find-a-doctor or call our provider referral line at 219-836-3477.



Mental Health Awareness



Caring for the Mind



Mental health is just as important as physical health. Conditions such as anxiety, depression and substance use disorders affect people of all ages and backgrounds. Communities face their own set of challenges related to stress, access and awareness.

Why Mental Health Matters

People often juggle busy schedules, long commutes and family responsibilities that can quietly affect mental well-being. While mental health resources may be close, barriers such as time constraints, stigma and difficulty prioritizing care can prevent people from seeking help. Pressures related to work, finances, caregiving and maintaining a fast-paced lifestyle can contribute to chronic stress and emotional exhaustion.

Mental health concerns can affect anyone. Recognizing the importance of emotional well-being is a critical step toward healthier individuals and families.

Recognizing the Signs

Mental health concerns do not look the same for everyone. Common signs may include persistent sadness, anxiety, changes in sleep or appetite, loss of interest in activities, difficulty concentrating or increased use of alcohol or drugs. These symptoms may be overlooked as normal stress or fatigue. Identifying changes early can help people seek support before symptoms worsen.

Steps Toward Better Mental Well-Being

Simple steps can make a meaningful difference. Staying connected with family and friends, maintaining daily routines, staying physically active and getting enough sleep all support mental health. Talking with a primary care provider is often a helpful first step. They can screen for concerns and recommend treatment or referrals when needed.

Building Stronger, Healthier Communities

Mental health awareness helps reduce stigma and encourages open conversations. This month, take time to check in with yourself and others, share trusted resources and remind your community that support is available. Caring for mental health strengthens individuals, families and the communities we call home. ■

FLAVOR AND WELLNESS ON THE GRILL

Summer is prime grilling season, and it's also a great time to enjoy meals that are full of flavor while supporting a healthy lifestyle. Whether you're hosting a backyard barbecue or making a quick weeknight dinner, thoughtful ingredient choices can turn grilling into a simple way to nourish your body.

Grilling doesn't have to mean heavy sauces or high-fat meats. Lean proteins, colorful vegetables and light marinades create satisfying meals that feel indulgent without being excessive.

Lean Proteins and Colorful Vegetables

Start with lean proteins such as skinless chicken or white fish, and pair them with a variety of vegetables. Grilled chicken with citrus and herbs delivers bold flavor without added fat, while vegetables, such as zucchini, bell pepper, onion and eggplant, add fiber and essential nutrients. Seafood

is another excellent option. Cook it quickly on the grill and pair it with fresh toppings such as tomato or avocado.

Tips for Healthier Grilling

Choose lean cuts, cook over medium heat, avoid heavy charring and fill at least half your plate with vegetables. With a few smart choices, grilling can be "both" delicious and heart-healthy all summer long. ■

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, American Heart Association, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine

SUMMER

is the Season for Prevention: Why Warm Weather is the Best Time for Health Screenings

Summer often is associated with busy schedules, outdoor activities and time spent with family and friends. But beneath the sunshine and seasonal routines lies an important opportunity that can have lasting benefits for your health. Health experts agree summer is one of the best times to prioritize preventive screenings and routine checkups.

Preventive care plays a critical role in identifying health concerns early, when treatment often is simpler, more effective and less disruptive to daily life. Many serious conditions, including heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers, can develop quietly without noticeable symptoms. Summer provides an ideal window to take action.

► Why Preventive Screenings Matter

Preventive screenings are designed to detect disease before it causes symptoms or complications. Early detection improves outcomes, reduces long-term healthcare costs and allows people to manage health conditions proactively.

Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States, and many adults often face higher rates of risk factors, such as high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes. Cancer screenings, including breast, colorectal, prostate and skin, can identify disease at an earlier stage, when treatment options often are more effective. Routine lab work also can uncover cholesterol issues, blood sugar abnormalities and other concerns that may otherwise go unnoticed.

► Why Summer Makes Scheduling Easier

While preventive care is important year-round, summer offers practical advantages. Improved weather means safer travel and fewer appointment cancellations, which is especially important where patients may travel longer distances for care.

Longer daylight hours make it easier to attend early morning or late afternoon appointments, and summer schedules often are more flexible with fewer holiday obligations. By completing screenings during summer, patients also can avoid the fall and winter rush, when illnesses increase and healthcare systems become busier.

► Key Screenings to Consider

Preventive screening needs vary by age and health history, but common screenings to consider include annual wellness visits, blood pressure and cholesterol checks, blood sugar testing, cancer screenings, bone density exams and vision or hearing tests. Summer is also a good time to update vaccinations and discuss any upcoming travel-related health needs with your provider.

► Preparing for an Active Season

Summer often brings increased physical activity, from yard work to recreational sports and outdoor exercise. Preventive screenings help ensure your body is ready for these demands. Identifying heart, joint, balance or vision concerns early can help reduce the risk of injuries and support safe, active living throughout the season.

► Take Action This Summer

Preventive care offers more than physical benefits. It provides peace of mind and helps you stay ahead of potential health concerns. Summer is a season of momentum, making it the perfect time to invest in your long-term well-being.

A few appointments now can lead to healthier months and years ahead. Prevention isn't about finding something wrong. It's about protecting what's right and staying active, independent and well. ■

For more information on preventive services offered at Powers Health, visit PowersHealth.org/HC-summer26.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, American Heart Association, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine



Sun, Sweat *and* Summer:

Smart Skin Care for Life



In the Midwest, summer often means full calendars and plenty of time outdoors. It is weekends on the lake, parents spending long hours in the stands at youth sporting events, early morning tee times, neighborhood walks and yard work. Fresh air and sunshine are part of the season, but they also place added demands on the skin. With the right habits, summer skin care can be simple, effective and protective for the long haul.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States and prolonged exposure to ultraviolet rays is a major risk factor. That makes awareness and prevention especially important for people who live, work and spend their free time outdoors. The goal is not to avoid summer, but to enjoy it while protecting the body's largest organ: skin.

■ Hydration: The Foundation of Healthy Skin

Healthy skin starts with hydration. Well-hydrated skin is more resilient, heals faster and is less prone to irritation. Summer heat, humidity, wind and sweat pull moisture from the skin, making daily care essential.

Drinking enough water supports skin health from the inside, especially for those active outdoors. After showering, swimming or lake days, applying a fragrance-free moisturizer while the skin is slightly damp helps lock in moisture. Hands, lower legs and elbows often dry out first and benefit from extra care.

Conditions such as eczema can worsen during warm months due to sweat, friction and frequent washing. Gentle cleansers, daily moisturizing and avoiding heavily fragranced products can help keep flare-ups under control throughout the summer.

■ Sun Protection for Everyday Life

Sun protection is not just for vacations. Exposure often happens in small but steady doses that add up over time. Sitting through weekend tournaments, boating or fishing, walking dogs, gardening or working outdoors contribute to cumulative sun exposure.

Health experts recommend using broad-spectrum sunscreen and reapplying it at least every two hours when outdoors. Sunscreen also should be reapplied

after swimming, sweating heavily or toweling off. Areas commonly missed include the ears, scalp, back of the neck, lips and tops of feet.

Protective clothing adds another layer of defense. Wide-brim hats, UV-blocking sunglasses and lightweight long sleeves can significantly reduce sun damage, especially for those who spend much of the day outside.

■ **Water Activities: Rinse and Restore**

Swimming is a summer staple, whether in backyard pools, community facilities or nearby lakes. Chlorine and natural water sources can dry the skin and strip away protective oils.

Rinsing off as soon as possible after swimming helps remove residue that can cause irritation. Following that rinse with moisturizer helps restore the skin barrier and reduce dryness. For children and adults with sensitive skin or eczema, this simple routine can make a noticeable difference.

■ **Outdoor Work and Elevated Risk**

Construction workers, landscapers, road crews and other outdoor professionals face some of the highest levels of sun exposure. Studies show outdoor workers experience higher rates of sunburn than the general population, increasing long-term skin cancer risk.

Practical protection matters. Keeping sunscreen in vehicles or toolboxes makes reapplication more realistic. Sunscreen sticks allow quick touch-ups on the face and neck. Breathable long sleeves, shade attachments on hard hats and regular breaks in shaded areas all support safer workdays.

Sunburn is not just uncomfortable; it is a sign of skin injury. Repeated burns raise the risk of serious skin conditions later in life.

■ **Mole Checks and Early Detection**

Early detection plays a critical role in skin cancer outcomes. Monthly self-checks help people notice changes early. Good lighting and mirrors can help with hard-to-see areas such as the scalp, behind the ears, the back and between toes.

Any spot that is new, changing, bleeding, crusting or not healing should be evaluated by a healthcare provider. Primary care providers often are the first step and can offer reassurance or referrals when needed.

■ **Skin Tags and Common Summer Concerns**

Skin tags are common, especially in areas where skin rubs together, such as the neck, underarms and waistline. While usually harmless, they can become irritated by sweat and activity.

Do not attempt removal at home. A primary care provider can confirm whether a growth is a typical skin tag and discuss safe removal or referral options if necessary.

■ **Managing Eczema in Warm Weather**

Eczema does not disappear in summer. Heat, sweat and tight clothing can trigger itching and flare-ups. Showering after heavy sweating, wearing breathable fabrics and moisturizing consistently can help reduce irritation.

If symptoms persist, healthcare providers can recommend prescription options or adjustments to care plans to keep skin comfortable and active all season.

■ **Enjoying Summer While Protecting Your Skin**

From boating and golf to job sites and ballfields, summer is meant to be enjoyed. By staying hydrated, protecting against sun exposure, rinsing after swimming and paying attention to skin changes, people can care for their skin without giving up the activities they love.

Healthy skin supports an active lifestyle today and helps protect long-term health for years to come. ■

For more information on services offered at Powers Health, visit PowersHealth.org/services-HC-summer26.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, American Heart Association, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine



Half Her Size

Hobart mom loses 170 pounds with help from Powers Health Bariatric Services

by Kerry Erickson

At 330 pounds, Maribel Flores Lira was in dire need of two knee replacement surgeries and worried she wouldn't live long enough to see her children's milestones.

Maribel, who then was 41 years old and the mother of a 3-year-old son and adult daughter, struggled to walk, play with her toddler, climb stairs and stay awake during the day. She knew she had to do something. Her doctor told her he would not approve knee surgery until she had lost weight.

"The knee surgery would be a Band-Aid if I didn't lose the weight," the Hobart resident said. "My doctor told me the pain would just come back. That was my breaking point. The pain was unbearable. I wanted to play with my son. I wanted to be around for him and my daughter."

When she decided to lose the weight for good, she turned to Powers Health Bariatric Services. Maribel met with Bariatric Surgeon Yazen Assaf, MD, who sat down with her, listened to her story and explained the different types of weight-loss surgeries available.

"Dr. Assaf went over each one with me and answered all of my questions and concerns. After several discussions with him and with my husband and daughter, I decided on the SADI-S procedure."

The Single Anastomosis Duodeno-Ileal Bypass with Sleeve Gastrectomy (SADI-S) operation is ideal

for patients who have had a prior sleeve gastrectomy and have regained weight or have not lost enough weight, or for patients who have a body mass index (BMI) greater than 50.

More Than Just Weight Loss

Prior to working with Powers Health and having her surgery in June 2024, Maribel's BMI was 60.4, she had high blood pressure, sleep apnea and was pre-diabetic. Today, at 160 pounds, her original BMI has been slashed in half, she no longer needs blood pressure medication, nor her C-Pap machine for sleep apnea, and her knee pain went from a 10 to zero or 1. She no longer needs her knees replaced.

Her "nonscale victories" have not stopped there.

"Every time we go to California to visit family, Disneyland is on the list of things to do," she said. "We love going to Disney, but because of my weight, I couldn't fit on all of the rides. Now, I am able to get on every attraction with my son. On one of the rides, I had to be strapped in twice because the belt was too loose!"

Her experience with the sometimes-not-so-friendly skies also became a more enjoyable.

"I no longer have to ask for a seatbelt extender or squeeze myself into the seat to make the person sitting next to me more comfortable," she said. "Even walking down the airplane aisle is so much easier."

Her clothes fit better, too. She shrank from a 4XL to a size small.

“The number on the scale doesn’t capture the full magnitude of what it means to lose excess weight,” Dr. Assaf said. “The little things that improve your quality of life, that improve your relationships are the things that really change people’s lives.”

Bariatric surgery was just a piece of her weight-loss success. She changed her lifestyle. She reads food labels, limits her intake of sugar and fats, drinks at least 64 ounces of water a day and goes on frequent walks, a task that used to leave her mentally and physically exhausted.

Maribel credits her family and Powers Health Bariatric team with helping her stay on track. She meets regularly with a dietitian and visits with Dr. Assaf at least once a year.

“I make those appointments a priority,” she said. “Talking to them helps put things back in perspective and reminds me of what I need to do to stay consistent. It took me 15 months to lose 170 pounds. In that time, I never stalled. I still would like to lose more to reach my personal goal. It’s reassuring to know I have the support I need.”

Expert in the Field

Dr. Assaf’s understanding of patients like Maribel comes from a place of expertise in the field and his own experiences.

Obesity is a chronic disease, he said.

“Society blames patients for being overweight, and that’s not fair. Every patient who I see has tried to lose weight over the course of their life and has made progress before relapsing,” said Dr. Assaf, who struggled with his own weight most of his life. “Our bodies are designed to hold on to the weight that we have. What surgery does is break that cycle. It allows you to make the changes and stick with them, and the body is not trying to get you back to the weight you were before. It’s unfortunate that society judges. You wouldn’t do that to someone with cancer. It’s going to take time to educate people that this is a chronic disease. It’s not laziness or lack of willpower.”

Maribel said anyone considering bariatric surgery needs to know you also have to be mentally prepared. Dr. Assaf agreed.

“That’s why we have all our patients go through an extensive process,” he said. “We provide them with



Left Top: Maribel Flores Lira is photographed on vacation before losing 170 pounds through Powers Health Bariatric Services.

Left Middle: Maribel Flores Lira visits with Bariatric Surgeon Yazen Assaf, MD, at St. Mary Medical Center in Hobart.

Left Below: Yazen Assaf, MD, is a board-certified general and bariatric surgeon with Powers Health.

Right Below: Maribel Flores Lira poses for a photo after her impressive weight loss.



education through our dietitians, nurses and a counselor, who makes sure each patient is ready for the changes needed before and after surgery. It’s about maintaining, not just about losing.” ■

For more information about Powers Health Bariatric Services, visit PowersHealth.org/bariatrics-HC-summer26.

Therapeutic Care

Patient with cancer finds healing in pelvic therapy

by Vanessa Negrete

FROM SURGERIES TO CHEMOTHERAPY to a staggering number of medical appointments and tests, cancer is physically and mentally exhausting.

By the time 46-year-old William Busch met with Powers Health's Therapy Services team to map out a plan to rebuild his strength, the rigors of cancer treatment had taken a toll.

"You feel like a fraction of a person because you can't do what you used to," the Lansing man said.

About 15 months after his diagnosis, William was paired with Maria Liberio, PT, DPT, a clinical specialist who specializes in oncology and pelvic health at Powers Health. Through pelvic therapy, William had two goals – to eliminate the need for hernia surgery and to grow strong enough to return to the gym.

He had to start with the basics – four weeks of breathing exercises.

"I used to kickbox," William said. "I'm used to working out hardcore. When I first got to therapy, I was not allowed to do a push-up. I thought, 'How far have I fallen that I can't even do a push-up? Being knocked down to breathing exercises was a big mental letdown.'"

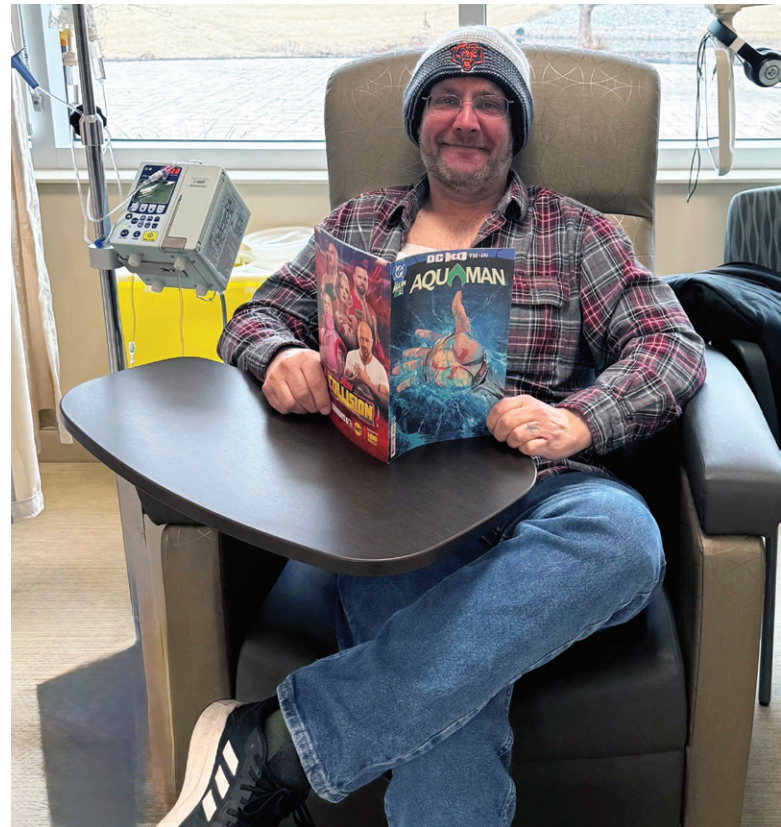
William trusted Maria.

"She laid out the process," William said. "She said, 'It's going to be slow, but you've got this.' She designed weekly workouts for me that slowly challenged my recovery."

He stretched, did yoga and worked his way up from lightweight to heavy resistance bands. Each passing week, he grew stronger.

"We put in the work," William said. "In doing that, we were able to avoid surgery on my hernia and get me back in the gym. It's taught me a lot about perseverance."

That lesson is one he will continue to lean on, as William knows staying healthy will be a challenge for the foreseeable future.



Above: Lansing resident William Busch undergoes cancer treatment in March 2026. Part of his routine is to read a comic book during his infusions and then donate the comic book to the Cancer Resource Center in Munster.

The first sign something was wrong came in 2024. "I was out on a business trip and felt a hard lump in my upper right abdomen," William said.

At the time, he was about three months into building an improved lifestyle – including a renewed dedication to exercise—to deal with hardships in his personal life. He thought maybe he had pulled a muscle.

Medical providers at an urgent care performed a sonogram that showed several lesions on his liver, so

they sent him to a nearby Emergency Department for further analysis. A gastroenterologist reviewed the findings and bloodwork. She had William return for follow-up testing in her office.

Less than three weeks later, on Feb. 28, 2024, William was diagnosed with liver cancer. He underwent a colonoscopy the next day. On March 6 of that year, he was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer with complete metastatic infiltration of the liver. Colon cancer had spread to his liver and overtaken it.

Testing revealed more than 60 tumors in his liver, one of which was the size of a golf ball.

He started chemotherapy to shrink the tumors ahead of surgery. Despite the cancer diagnosis and start of chemo, William continued to work. But six weeks into chemo, he was part of a wave of job terminations. Fortunately, he had amassed some financial savings and was able to focus on his health.

“I have a really good support team. It is one of the things that kept me going.”

After 14 rounds of chemotherapy, William underwent his first liver surgery on Oct. 7, 2024. A 3-inch section of colon was removed, along with 12 tumors from the left half of his liver.

“That was a Monday, and by Tuesday afternoon, I started walking,” William said.

Tuesday night, he experienced complications and underwent emergency surgery Wednesday morning.

“By Friday, I was walking the stairs,” he said. “My body reacted well to everything.”

By Saturday, he was out of the Intensive Care Unit. Monday, he underwent a liver ablation for the tumors. He went home Oct. 17, 2024 and healed for six weeks until his next surgery.

“My body responded so well the entire time,” he said.

On Dec. 2, 2024, a surgeon removed the right half of his liver, which was riddled with more than 50 tumors, and his gall bladder. After a five-week post-operative break, William was back on chemo.

“I did six more rounds of chemo between January and April of 2025,” he said. “On that sixth round, they declared me in remission for the first time. That’s when I met Maria.”

William had a lot of abdominal pain from a hernia over his incision, Maria said.

“We worked together on bowel health and lifestyle factors,” she said. “He continued exercising during all his chemo sessions and were able to reduce his hernia. He had no pain when we completed therapy.”

Remission lasted only two months. Tests on June 6 revealed cancer had returned.

“I’ve been doing chemo since June of 2025,” William said. “I know I will do chemo the rest of my life.”

At the end of January 2026, he was reduced to maintenance level chemo. That lasted eight weeks until another tumor developed on his liver. In early May, he was slated to undergo Y-90 radioembolization, a two-part minimally invasive form of radiation therapy to remove the tumor.

William carries a green notebook with him to every doctor’s appointment; he jots dates, logs test results and notes answers to his questions. Every other week, he texts updates to a group comprising more than 100 people from all chapters of his life.

Raised in Porter County, William worked as a stage hand at the now-demolished Star Plaza Theater. He ran the spotlight for famous acts and even did fire control when prop comic Carrot Top performed.

He studied music business in college and moved to California to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. He found work in rehearsal studios and hosted battle of the bands competitions.

He segued into a more stable career in renewable energy, first in California and then in Las Vegas. When his father died in 2016, William moved back to the Midwest and worked in the electric vehicle industry until he was laid off. Since then, finding work has been a struggle.

“I’m looking for the company that sees my resume and sees someone who is not scared to move forward, who sees me as an asset.”

In the meantime, William does outreach through text-based support for the American Cancer Society.

“People get diagnosed and they reach out,” he said. “I’m willing to share my story and my experience with them.”

William credits his own network of family, friends and former colleagues for much of his progress.

“I have a really good support team,” he said. “It is one of the things that kept me going.” ■

To learn more about Therapy services at Powers Health, visit PowersHealth.org/therapy-services-HC-summer26.

Facing a family history

Valpo man turns to Powers Health
for heart care

by Vanessa Negrete



He **ATE HEALTHY FOODS**, did not drink alcohol or smoke. He managed his stress. He meditated. At 64, Don Conrad could do 60 push-ups in a row.

"I checked all the boxes for a great heart," the Valparaiso man said.

Having witnessed his father die at age 40 of a massive heart attack, Don had been intentional in living a lifestyle that would carve a healthier path. Aside from two bouts with cancer, his overall health was strong.

Routine medical screenings revealed nothing alarming.

"I had very little plaque in my veins, so I figured my heart was OK," he said. "I was kind of cocky about it."

A friend who underwent a preventive heart scan encouraged Don to do the same, just to be sure.

"He was nagging me," Don recalled. "But I felt great. I didn't have issues."

Partly to appease his friend, Don underwent a heart scan. The scan showed three blockages – including a 100 percent blockage and a 95 percent blockage – and the possibility of a fourth.

Despite a lifetime of making healthy choices, Don – whose paternal grandparents also died from heart attacks – could not overcome his genes.

"I've been living this way to try to avoid surgery for the last 45 years," Don said. "I've been trying to beat the genetics."

Don followed up with Cardiologist

Abdulrazzak Kawamleh, MD, who conducted a more thorough exam and referred Don to Cardiothoracic Surgeon Jason Frazier, MD.

Dr. Frazier performed a triple bypass on Don in January at St. Mary Medical Center in Hobart. Motivated to begin the healing process, Don did not rest for long.

"The first day, I walked two laps around the unit," he said.

After a four-day hospital stay, he was sent home with a good prognosis. Don, a married father of two, said he believes that good energy and the power of positive thinking play a key role in healing and in supporting overall health.

The healthcare system continues to invest in advanced diagnostic tools and treatment options to meet the cardiovascular needs of residents in Northwest Indiana.

When it was safe to resume exercise, he headed back to a treadmill at the gym and started walking. His goal is to be off all medications one year post-surgery.

Don is grateful for the care team he had at St. Mary Medical Center. He and his wife, who is a chaplain at the hospital, later returned to the unit where he stayed so he could visit with his healthcare providers and give them cards of thanks.



Left: Don Conrad, 64, underwent a triple bypass at Powers Health. The Valparaiso man maintains a healthy lifestyle, but he has a family history of heart issues.

“If I live to 67, I will be the first male in my immediate family to ever collect Social Security,” Don said. “I’m on my way!”

Cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States, according to the American Heart Association.

On average, someone in the United States dies of cardiovascular disease every 34 seconds. Nearly 50 percent of adults in the United States have some form of heart disease or stroke, according to the organization.

Powers Health has established a reputation as a leader in cardiovascular care, consistently demonstrating expertise and commitment in treating patients at the hands of some of the Midwest’s most experienced heart specialists.

The healthcare system continues to invest in advanced diagnostic tools and treatment options to meet the cardiovascular needs of residents in Northwest Indiana.

Recent milestones include the following:

- Powers Health became the first healthcare system in Indiana to use the SEISMIQ™ Intravascular Lithotripsy (IVL) system from Boston Scientific, an acoustic pressure wave therapy that supports physicians in treating patients with complex calcified peripheral artery disease (PAD). PAD is a common

circulatory condition in which narrowed arteries reduce blood flow to the limbs, most often in the legs.

- Structural heart specialists successfully performed the transcatheter tricuspid edge-to-edge repair (TEER) on patients using TriClip by Abbott. This is an innovative, minimally invasive treatment option for people with tricuspid regurgitation, a common heart valve condition.

- Cardiologists performed the healthcare system’s first procedure using a pulsed field ablation system (PFA) that delivers targeted electrical pulses to treat areas of heart tissue that cause atrial fibrillation, or AFib. The new procedure offers a safe and effective alternative to traditional ablation methods.

- Powers Health achieved another milestone in cardiovascular care with a new minimally invasive approach to treat complex aortic aneurysms. A team at Community Hospital in Munster recently used the GORE EXCLUDER Thoracoabdominal Branch Endoprosthesis (TAMBE). In open surgery, specialists enter through the patient’s chest and abdomen. With TAMBE, they access the aorta via the groin and use catheters to place a specially designed stent that helps blood flow to the liver, kidneys and stomach. ■

For more information about cardiovascular care at Powers Health, visit PowersHealth.org/heart-HC-summer26.

Critical Intervention

Powers Health leading the way in minimally invasive TAVR procedures

by Karin Saltanovitz

A

ROUTINE ANNUAL exam took a serious turn for Mark Hittle.

His primary care doctor detected a heart murmur and referred Mark for an echocardiogram. It showed critical aortic stenosis, a heart condition which required immediate attention.

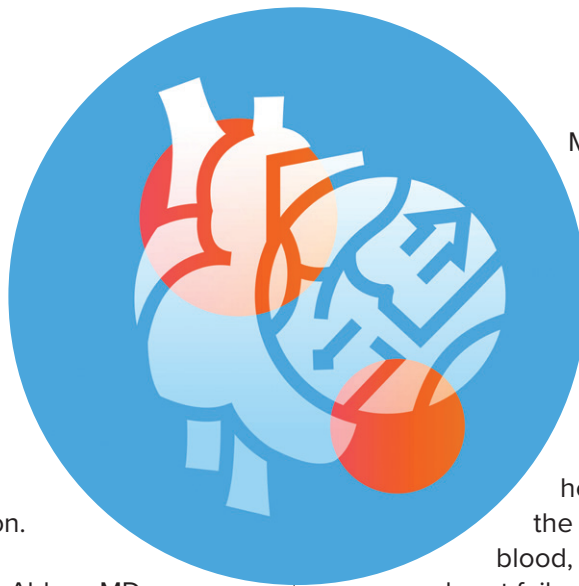
On the same day as his echocardiogram, Mark saw Samer Abbas, MD, an interventional cardiologist and co-medical director of Powers Health Cardiovascular Services and Structural Heart and Valve Clinic.

Mark, an active 70-year-old Lowell resident, was surprised by the news.

"It was quite a jolt to learn that I was in really bad shape in terms of my heart," Mark said. "Dr. Abbas made it clear that I had a serious condition."

Within 10 days of the diagnosis, Mark underwent transcatheter aortic valve replacement, or TAVR, at Community Hospital in Munster.

"The mortality rate for severe aortic stenosis is higher than many cancers," Dr. Abbas said. "So, when I met



Mark, a very active man with critical aortic stenosis, we took quick action to make sure he was treated as soon as possible."

One of the most common heart valve diseases, aortic stenosis is a narrowing of the aortic valve opening that causes a slowing of blood flow to the heart. This narrowed valve causes the heart to work harder at pumping blood, which may lead to weakening, heart failure and potential death. Certain

medications or lifestyle modifications may treat symptoms or delay major problems, but eventually the only successful treatment for aortic stenosis may be valve replacement surgery.

Mark's choices were to undergo minimally invasive TAVR or endure the rigors of a complex open-heart procedure.

During the TAVR procedure, a new valve is delivered through a small incision in the groin or chest and passes through an artery to the heart. The damaged valve remains in place, and a new valve is positioned to take over the job of regulating blood flow.

Recovery is much quicker with TAVR. It also does not



Above: Mark Hittle, now 72, stays active by volunteering at Kankakee Sands Nature Preserve.

Right: Samer Abbas, MD, is an interventional cardiologist and co-medical director of Powers Health Cardiovascular Services and Structural Heart and Valve Clinic.

require patients to rely on a bypass machine, which is required for traditional valve replacement surgeries.

“We had a trip planned that I would have missed out on had we gone the open-heart route,” Mark said. “Using TAVR enabled me to get back in action much quicker.”

Now 72, Mark, rarely takes an afternoon nap, something he used to do regularly because he tired so easily. He keeps busy with 4-mile walks with his wife, yard work and volunteering at Kankakee Sands.

“I would certainly recommend TAVR to anyone who is in the same situation I was,” he said. “If it’s an option, I just can’t see going the other route.”

The Powers Health Structural Heart and Valve team was a pioneer of the TAVR program and is one

“I would certainly recommend TAVR to anyone who is in the same situation I was. If it’s an option, I just can’t see going the other route.”

of the most experienced in the Chicago area. Since 2017, more than 1,200 TAVRs have been performed in Community Hospital’s hybrid operating room, which is equipped with advanced video integration technology that aids in real-time imaging and continual medical assessment. A team of fellowship-trained interventional cardiologists and cardiothoracic surgeons leads the procedures.

Community Hospital has been awarded the American College of Cardiology’s Transcatheter Valve Certification based on evaluation of the staff’s ability to meet

standards for multidisciplinary teams, formalized training, shared decision-making and registry performance.

“The American College of Cardiology certification validates Powers Health’s cardiology program and the high-quality experience and skills of our team to provide evidence-based,



patient-centered care,” Dr. Abbas said. “Powers Health is dedicated to providing exceptional care, ensuring our patients have access to the latest innovations in heart health.” ■

For more information about cardiovascular services at the hospitals of PowersHealth.org/heart-HC-summer26.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



170 Pounds
Gone



Therapeutic
Care



All About
the Heart



TAVR Saving
Lives

Stroke Awareness: WHY IT MATTERS

It is important to raise awareness about one of the leading causes of death and long-term disability in the United States: stroke. A stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is blocked or when a blood vessel ruptures, depriving brain cells of oxygen. Because damage can begin within minutes, recognizing symptoms and acting quickly is critical, even where access to care may be closer but everyday routines can still delay response.

Know the Warning Signs: BE FAST

Recognizing stroke symptoms early can save a life. The **BE FAST** method helps identify warning signs quickly and clearly.

Understanding Stroke Risk in Suburban Life

Stroke risk increases with age but many contributing factors are preventable. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, obesity and physical inactivity raise stroke risk. Busy schedules, long commutes, sedentary

workdays and reliance on convenience foods can quietly increase risk over time.

Because many people feel generally healthy, warning signs may be overlooked or dismissed. Routine screenings and regular checkups play an important role in identifying concerns early before a stroke occurs.

Prevention Starts With Everyday Choices

Getting regular checkups, managing blood pressure, staying active, eating a heart-healthy diet and avoiding tobacco can lower stroke risk. Small daily habits like taking walks, preparing balanced meals and keeping up with medication can make a meaningful difference.

This summer take time to learn the warning signs, share them with family friends and co-workers and encourage proactive healthcare. When it comes to stroke, quick recognition and prevention can save lives. ■

B



Balance:
Sudden loss
of balance or
coordination

E



Eyes:
Sudden trouble
seeing in one or
both eyes

F



Face:
Facial
drooping or
uneven smile

A



Arms:
Weakness or
numbness in
one arm

S



Speech:
Slurred or
difficult
speech

T



Time:
Call 911
immediately