

PRESS RELEASE

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TOM CHRISTERSON ENJOYS EVERYDAY LIFE IN CENTRAL CITY
World's Second AbioCor Patient Spending Time with Family and Friends

CENTRAL CITY, Ky. – The morning's conversation bounced around local politics, a recent boxing match, horse racing and much good-natured ribbing. A dozen or so men have gathered around the same table at a local restaurant for the past several years trading jibes and opinions. Such everyday activity is what Tom Christerson worked so hard to regain.

On September 13, 2001, Tom Christerson became the world's second recipient of the AbioCor™ Implantable Replacement Heart, manufactured by ABIOMED, Inc. of Danvers, MA, in a landmark surgery performed at Jewish Hospital by University of Louisville surgeons Laman Gray, M.D., and Rob Dowling, M.D.

Background footage of Tom Christerson in his hometown of Central City, Ky., and of Dr. Dowling discussing the AbioCor Implantable Replacement Heart will be up-linked via satellite coordinates Ku-Band SBS 6, Transponder 5, Horizontal Frequency 11823 MHZ, 74 degrees West. The audio frequency is 6.20/6.80. The signal will be available from 2:15-2:45 p.m. (EDT), Tuesday, June 18.

Christerson made history again on April 16 when he became the first artificial heart patient to go home. He now spends his days breakfasting with friends, catching up on the local gossip at the barbershop and enjoying his family. He has also celebrated the birth of his great-granddaughter, Ellen Thomas, named in his honor.

"Just getting here, going over to the coffee shop and seeing my buddies," has made the months of recuperation worthwhile, Christerson said. "I've been with my friends, I see them every morning. I've talked to the barbers to see what's going on around town. They know everything. If you don't believe me, just ask them."

When Christerson came to Jewish Hospital in September, he wasn't expected to live more than 30 days. He chose the only option available for him, the AbioCor artificial heart.

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AbioCor Update

Asked what he would tell others who are considering a similar surgery, Christerson said: "I'd say do it. I wouldn't hesitate to tell them to go ahead and get it done."

He joked about the small red bag he uses to carry his battery pack everywhere he goes. "I'll live with it the rest of my life. I guess I'll have to get me two or three different colors so I won't be carrying the same one all the time. You can get color coordinated."

Drs. Gray and Dowling are pleased with Christerson's progress, and with the first year of the clinical trial.

"He's home, enjoying life. One of the things that was interesting is after he was sent home, we did not get any calls. He went home and has done great. I insist on him coming to Louisville for weekly office visits but he doesn't think he needs to be seen by a doctor," said Dr. Dowling.

"We couldn't be more pleased with Tom's progress," added Dr. Gray. "Watching him return to his home and family has been a thrill for everyone involved in the project."

The physicians noted that the year since the first patient was implanted with an artificial heart on July 2 has been an exciting one. Bob Tools became the world's first patient to receive an AbioCor implantable heart on July 2, 2001, during surgery performed by Drs. Gray and Dowling at Jewish Hospital. Tools lived with the device 151 days.

"If we look at the goals, we said before we got into this what are our realistic goals. If we put this artificial heart into patients that are so sick that they're not going to live 30 days, one of our realistic goals was to have one of the patients survive 60 days. Well Bob Tools lived for about five months. Tom Christerson is now nine months and living home. This is unprecedented. No one has ever gone home with an artificial heart before. He's having a good quality of life," Dr. Dowling said.

"The success of the artificial heart project has exceeded our expectations. We are very much interested in continuing this study. We are still screening potential candidates," Dr. Gray said. "People interested in more information should ask their cardiologists to call our office."

The next milestone for Christerson is getting back into the swing of his card games and becoming a regular at his houseboat. Christerson said he wants to "get out into our second home, down to the lake where we've got a houseboat. Then we've got a third home at Lake Malone, too, a cabin up there. So we've got all kinds of ... places."

Jewish Hospital is among the top 10 cardiac centers in the United States and, along with the University of Louisville, is dedicated to excellence in clinical care, research and education. University of Louisville surgeons at Jewish Hospital have performed many heart care "firsts," including Kentucky's first heart transplant, the world's first heart transplant following the use of a Thoratec bi-ventricular assist device, the world's first endoscopic saphenous vein harvest and the first ventricular remodeling in the region.

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