



**Transplant Recipient International Organization  
Pittsburgh Chapter  
July 2012 Newsletter**  
by Paul Armbruster

**IN CASE YOU MISSED IT**

The summer edition of the Pennsylvania Caregiver Magazine, published by TRIB TOTAL MEDIA, featured several TRIO members and their transplant story as well as the TRIO Celebration of Life Dinner held on May 18. One of the contributors of the magazine, Gen Lucidi Payne, contacted me in the spring and asked if I would be willing to share my transplant story with her and if I knew others who would do the same. Besides my wife, Chris, and me, Gen also interviewed other TRIO members, including Tom and Donna Meshanko and Robb and Lora Wilson. She not only covered transplant stories, but also included articles regarding some interesting statistics of organ donation, myths versus facts of organ donation and organizations to contact for financial help for recipients and living donors.

The Caregiver Magazine insert was included in both the Pittsburgh Tribune Review and the Greensburg Tribune Review on Saturday, June 16. It was not in the Sunday edition and unfortunately, it is not available for viewing online. Due to the length of the articles, I plan to insert one or two articles into the TRIO newsletter in the upcoming months, courtesy of TRIB TOTAL MEDIA. This month I am using the article titled, “*COPING WITH CAREGIVER STRESS*”. It covers my liver transplant story and Chris’s views as a caregiver.



Chris and Paul Armbruster

***COPING WITH CAREGIVER STRESS*** by Gen Lucidi Payne (courtesy of TRIB TOTAL MEDIA)

*The emotions embroiled with organ transplants are enormous.*

*There’s the lows on learning a loved one needs a transplant—to the highs of celebrating a second chance at life. And in between comes dealing with the day-to-day realities of rearranging lifestyles to care for the loved one, balancing family responsibilities and handling the related financial obligations.*

*The stress can tear apart or bind families closer.*

*It's a challenge Paul and Chris Armbruster first faced a decade ago after Paul's sudden weight gain, bloated body and swollen ankles were shockingly traced to the hepatitis C virus which caused his liver to fail.*

*"I couldn't believe I needed a liver transplant. I had no idea how I was exposed to the hepatitis C virus which can be dormant for as long as 20 years. I was determined to prevent it from getting the best of me," Paul recalls.*

*Chris, a teacher aide with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, said her initial anger at the unexpected medical problems faded as she admiringly watched Paul's determination to follow doctors' orders and remain healthy until a liver became available.*

*"He was going to be strong and so was I. Our children were 17 and 12 and they needed their parents united and successful. We had to be one solid, loving unit. It was not an easy task."*

*Initially, Paul started drug therapy to combat the liver failure. But, when his platelet count dropped dangerously low, he had to quit the drugs. Despite his weakened condition, Paul continued working as a cellular technician at Cricket Communications until a liver became available.*

*Meanwhile, to ensure he would be physically, mentally and spiritually prepared for the operation, Paul adhered to an intense 45-minute daily routine that involved walking or exercising, reading or solving puzzles and praying.*

*"My plan worked and I maintained a strong positive attitude," says Paul.*

*After waiting a year on the transplant list, the 47-year-old Pleasant Hills father received his new liver on Oct. 5, 2002, at UPMC Presbyterian Hospital. Three months later he returned to work. But within five years Paul went on disability because doctors were concerned his job's physical demands might cause the portal veins connecting to the liver to rupture from stress. Today he remains hepatitis-free.*

*"Paul's donor gave the gift of life to all of us. I want to shout from the mountain tops that organ donation is truly the most unselfish thing anyone can do. It is an indescribable gift. I cannot thank our anonymous donor enough," says Chris. "In spite of and because of this miracle, we love each other now even more than ever."*

*Here is Chris' advice for caregivers:*

- **Keep your faith.** *We pray intensely. It is the No.1 reason we are all together. Personally, my faith grew stronger and remains a great comfort.*
- **Take care of yourself.** *Find a stress reliever - shopping, eating out, exercising, a craft or hobby. Keep your common sense. You know yourself better than anyone else.*
- **Have a support system.** *Our children support us, keep us grounded and focused. Friends are lifesavers with all the ways they helped.*
- **Stay positive.** *Paul's attitude and the fact that he does not accept defeat keep us upbeat.*
- **Learn to Laugh.** *Laughter keeps us all together. When things get intense we argue, nitpick and then we laugh.*
- **Trust yourself.** *An overwhelming amount of information comes your way. It does not always pertain to your case. A hospital employee told me the day after surgery that I would need a hospital bed in my living room and would have to stop working. I was devastated at first, but then I decided that wouldn't happen to us and it didn't.*
- **Enjoy life.** *We love being with our children and our dogs and taking advantage of every day whether it's snow, rain or sunshine. If possible, do some traveling.*

- **Join support groups.** *As members of TRIO (Transplant Recipients International Organization), we offer first hand experiences to help others prepare for transplants. Paul serves as TRIO secretary which he calls a way honoring his donor and donor family by showing his appreciation for a second chance at life.*

*As Paul marks his 10-year transplant anniversary, he lovingly credits Chris for her unwavering understanding and ability to never complain. "I cannot thank her enough for all the things she did for me. Every morning, I thank my donor and donor family and God that I am still alive. Without them, I would not be here today."*

*Chris' gratefulness for "the miracle of an organ" is stronger than ever. "We prayed Paul would make our two sons' high school graduations. He not only witnessed their high school graduations, but their college graduations, our oldest son's marriage, birth of our first grandchild and the incredible celebration of our 30th wedding anniversary."*

## **SAVE THE DATE**

The annual TRIO picnic is planned for Sunday, August 12, 2012. It will be held at Cecil Township Park, Pavilion #3 (the same place as last year) and will begin at 1:00. As in the past, "Mitch's Barbeque" is catering the picnic with hot dogs, hamburgers, salads and baked beans. The desert will be the infamous make-your-own ice cream sundae bar. The catered picnic is free to TRIO members and only \$5.00 for non-TRIO guests. So, mark your calendar and plan to attend this fun-filled day at the park.

## **TRIO Leadership Summit 2012: Not Just for "Leaders"**

All TRIO members and guests are invited to a "Leadership Summit" and celebration of TRIO's 25 years of service. The two-day event takes place on Friday and Saturday, September 28-29 at the offices of Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE), 204 Sigma Drive, RIDC Park, Pittsburgh, PA 15238. Videos will be available for viewing, special speakers and panel discussions can be heard as well as a gala dinner event on Friday night. For more information and to register, go to the national TRIO website at [TRIOweb.org](http://TRIOweb.org)

## **UPCOMING TRIO SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS**

TRIO Support Group Meetings are held on the third Sunday of the month, except in the months of August, due to our picnic, and in the month of December, due to our Holiday Party. The meetings begin at 1:30 PM and alternate between Allegheny General Hospital, Snyder Auditorium and UPMC Montefiore Hospital LHAS Auditorium. Flyers are normally sent out before the meetings as well as being posted on the TRIO website.

Upcoming support group meetings will take place on:

**Sunday, July 15 at UPMC**

Sunday, September 16 at AGH

Sunday, October 21 at UPMC

Sunday, November 18 at AGH

## **NEXT TRIO SUPPORT GROUP MEETING**

The next TRIO Support Group Meeting is at UPMC, LHAS Auditorium at 1:30 P.M. on Sunday, July 15. The speaker and topic is still pending.

## **CURRENT TRIO-PITTSBURGH BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Mary Alice King (President), Rudy Molnar (Vice President), Rich Wegrzyn (Treasurer), Paul Armbruster (Secretary), Chris Armbruster, Anna DiPilato, Shannon Flynn, Kathy Jacobs, Carol Foglia, Tom Meshanko, Jo Anne Schwarz, DeeAnne Seeger, Georgene Thomas and Colleen Yost.

## **CURRENT TRIO-PITTSBURGH CHAPTER HONORARY BOARD MEMBERS**

Dr. Kareem Abu-Elmagd, Dr. Thomas Cacciarelli, Dr. Barbara Carpenter, Dr. Robert Kormos, Dr. George Mazariegos, Dr. Dennis McNamara, Dr. Srinivas Murali, Dr. Obaid Shakil Shaikh, Dr. Ron Shapiro, Dr. Thomas Starzl, Susan Stuart, Dr. Henkie Tan, Dr. Ngoc Thai, Dr. Kusum Tom and Dr. Steven Webber.

## **WELCOME NEW TRIO MEMBER**

Victoria Birnbaum who had a liver transplant on 12-20-09

## **HAPPY JULY ANNIVERSARIES**

Lynn Deal: Liver recipient: 7-15-10

Domenic DiPilato: Kidney recipient: 7-29-06

Ellen Kerber: Liver recipient: 7-7-09 & 7-26-09

Ted Mains: Kidney & Pancreas recipient: 7-9-99

M. Wayne Meyers: Heart recipient: 7-17-04

Matt & Marnie Repasky: Matt: Kidney recipient from his mother, Marnie (LD): 7-6-79

Nathan & Susan Repasky: Nathan: Kidney recipient from his sister-in-law, Susan Repasky (LD): 7-3-06

## **TO CONTACT TRIO-PITTSBURGH CHAPTER:**

Phone: 412-647-7461 or 1-877-647-3439

The mailing address is TRIO Pittsburgh / 3601 Fifth Avenue, Room 601 / Pittsburgh, PA 15213

For more information about TRIO Pittsburgh, visit the website at [www.trio-pittsburgh.org](http://www.trio-pittsburgh.org)

## **HEART SUPPORT GROUP MEETING**

The next scheduled Heart Support Group Meeting is on Saturday, July 21 at Panera Bread on the Boulevard of the Allies. The meeting begins at 12:30 and lasts until 2:00.

For more information, contact Tom Meshanko at [t.meshanko@verizon.net](mailto:t.meshanko@verizon.net) or call 412-351-6704.

## **UPCOMING WESTERN PA KIDNEY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING**

Saturday, July 14th - South Hills, Jefferson Regional Medical Center (James Bibro Pavilion), Jefferson Hills  
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM.

Contact Diana Bell [dkbell1981@yahoo.com](mailto:dkbell1981@yahoo.com) 724-292-9318

Sunday, July 22nd – Pittsburgh East, Panera Bread, Wilkins Twp, 1:00 - 3:00 PM.

Contact Robb Wilson [robbw81@yahoo.com](mailto:robbw81@yahoo.com) 412-823-5630

Pediatric Contact: Lori Bible 724-981-0368 [sbible6@msn.com](mailto:sbible6@msn.com)

For more information about kidney disease and support groups visit [www.wpakidneysupport.org](http://www.wpakidneysupport.org)

## **LOCAL SUPPORT GROUPS for LIVER DISEASE**

### **GREATER PITTSBURGH PBC (PRIMARY BILIARY CIRRHOSIS) SUPPORT GROUP**

Meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at Panera Bread – Waterworks Mall – Fox Chapel

For more information contact Ellen Kerber or email at [kerber@kerbers.com](mailto:kerber@kerbers.com)

### **LIVING WITH HEPATITIS SUPPORT GROUP**

Meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month at

330 South 9th Street, Main Bldg., Room 182 Pittsburgh, PA 15203

For more information contact Jen Warner at 412-535-2670

### WESTMORELAND COUNTY SUPPORT GROUP

Meets every other month on the 3rd Monday (Jan, March, May, July, Sept and Nov) at Hempfield Church of Christ 144 Hugh Black Rd Greensburg, PA 15601

For more information contact Antonia or Mike Redigan at 724-423-5948 or [antoniaredigan@hotmail.com](mailto:antoniaredigan@hotmail.com)

### CIRRHOSIS ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP

Online cirrhosis support group at [www.mdjunction.com/cirrhosis](http://www.mdjunction.com/cirrhosis)

For more information go to: AMERICAN LIVER FOUNDATION - WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER at [www.liverfoundation.org/chapters/westernpa/](http://www.liverfoundation.org/chapters/westernpa/)

### **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

Sunday, July 15, 1:30 PM: TRIO Support Group Meeting is at UPMC, LHAS Auditorium

Friday, July 20, 7:05 PM: American Liver Foundation Night at PNC Park

Come watch the Pirates take on the Miami Marlins and receive a FREE Pirate T-shirt.

The ALF is hosting a special night at PNC Park to honor and acknowledge those with liver disease in our region.

A portion of each ticket sale will benefit the ALF in its fight against liver disease.

\$5.00 of the \$20.00 ticket price for the Outfield Reserved seats and

\$3.00 of the \$16.00 ticket price for the Grandstand section

For more information and to order tickets contact Chaz Kellum at 412-325-4731 or [chaz.kellem@pirates.com](mailto:chaz.kellem@pirates.com)

Sunday, August 12, 1:00 PM: Annual TRIO Picnic at Cecil Twp. Park, Pavilion #3

August 27 through September 2, 2012: ANSYS Mylan Golf Classic at Southpointe Golf Club

Eleven Nationwide Tour players in the U.S. Open field will participate with others in this local golfing event.

Once again, Second Chance at Life will be selling tickets at

<https://www.mylanclassic.com/buytix/SECONDCHANCEATLIFE/>

100% of ticket sales from this site benefit Second Chance at Life, Pennsylvania Chapter.

Friday and Saturday, September 28-29: TRIO Leadership Summit at CORE

For more information visit the national TRIO website at [TRIOweb.org](http://TRIOweb.org)

### **In closing:**

The 2012 Transplant Games of America will take place in Grand Rapids, MI from July 28 – July 31, 2012. On behalf of the TRIO Board of Directors, best of luck to all the members of Team Pittsburgh. We hope you have good weather, good luck and have the time of your life.

While at the games please remember this proverb:

*“A good exercise for the heart is bending down and helping someone get up.”*

Author unknown.

Respectfully submitted by Paul Armbruster, TRIO Pittsburgh Secretary