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Kary Yurcisin and his son, Tyler

HEART HERO ADVOCATE FOR HEALTHY LIFESTYLE AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

GREENSBURG, PA, March 12, 2012 ... Kary Yurcisin has spent the last 20 years in sales of one sort or another. For the rest of his life, heart health will be the product he's pushing. The 40-year-old Harrison City husband and father knows the subject intimately, having experienced a series of life-sustaining cardiac interventions over the past eight months in response to an undetected 100% blockage in the left anterior descending artery.

Yurcisin will be honored March 24 during the annual Westmoreland County Heart Ball hosted by American Heart Association at the Greensburg Country Club. He also will help to promote American Heart Association initiatives in the coming year, in particular the Westmoreland County Heart Walk held in September at the Kennametal Fitness Trail in Unity Township.

Without the medical expertise of emergency responders and Excela Health's Heart Center staff, Yurcisin's family would be memorializing rather than honoring him this month. Instead, Yurcisin is an inspiration to his teen-age son, a baseball player, who has voluntarily changed his diet and exercise habits to forestall a possible cardiac event of his own, and a testament to the importance of research, education and treatment made possible by donations to American Heart Association.

Yurcisin's story began June 12, 2011, in front of a TV set in his parents' Adamsburg home where he and his dad were watching NASCAR. "I experienced the most incredible pain and I rolled onto the floor; my legs wouldn't support me. I knew something was wrong, probably a heart attack. More importantly, I knew I didn't want to die."

With Rescue 14 less than a mile away, Yurcisin was en route to Excela Westmoreland Hospital in short order. Following several cardiac arrests in the emergency department, Yurcisin was finally stable enough for a cardiac catheterization, but the news wasn't good. Although interventional cardiologist Howard Grill, MD, medical director of the cath lab, could dilate and stent the vessel, Yurcisin's heart was so damaged he needed to remain on a balloon pump for two days.

The natural pumping action of Yurcisin's heart was so diminished, he was initially fitted with a LifeVest, a wearable defibrillator that would shock his heart back into rhythm should he experience sudden cardiac arrest. In November, Yurcisin received an implantable cardiac defibrillator/ pacemaker, at the hands of electrophysiologist Sandeep Arora, MD. Beyond the possibility of cardiac arrest, the persistent left ventricular dysfunction means Yurcisin tires easily, and is out of breath upon modest exertion. Uncertain if he will be a candidate for a heart transplant, Yurcisin is adapting to the "new normal." Since sales is such a high-stress, performance-based occupation, he's enrolled in online classes to prepare for a career change.

As for his family, wife Pam, (Director of Calvary Preschool Center in Irwin), in efforts to encourage him with his recovery, says "We have a deal: I won't do what he won't do; I'll do what he can't."

And one thing he can do is inspire his offspring, 14-year-old son Tyler and daughters Tori, 16 and Melanie, 18, to take charge of their health. "We explained this is part of their genetic makeup now, so we need to do things correctly going forward," Pam Yurcisin added. Rather than play video games constantly, 5-foot-9 Tyler is running, doing Tae-Bo, practicing baseball, and choosing broccoli, fish and water over fast food and sodas. "He's a bigger kid, and was starting to gain weight," his dad recalled. "This is something he decided to do, and we're really proud of him." Tori is a level 9 competitive gymnast for Penn Trafford High School and the YMCA. Melanie is an accomplished competitive dancer of 16 years. All are students in the Penn-Trafford School District.

"I received the right care in the right place at the right time," Yurcisin said. "That's what I'd wish for everybody. If my story can help somebody else, it will have been worth it all."