

Lt. Colonel Receives New Heart

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It started out as an ordinary run in preparation for the Rock 'N Roll Marathon. It ended three weeks later when UCSD heart transplant surgeon, Michael Madani, MD transplanted a new heart into Lt. Colonel Noel Scott Wood at the University of California, San Diego Medical Center's Thornton Hospital.

On March 29, Lt. Col. Wood, Director of the Marine Corps Recruiters School and a combat veteran, went for a routine afternoon run, exiting one of the gates at San Diego's Marine Corps Recruit Depot. But the married father of two didn't make it far. Minutes later, the fit 44 year-old collapsed of a heart attack and was rushed to Balboa Navy Hospital

Over the next 24 hours the Carlsbad resident suffered four more heart attacks. After his artery ruptured, he was taken into surgery for a coronary artery bypass graft surgery that would route blood flow around the diseased artery. When doctors couldn't wean him off the heart bypass machine that takes over the heart's function during surgery he was transferred to UCSD's Thornton Hospital where he was placed on a blood pump, a short term solution for a failing heart. Shortly thereafter Madani opened Wood's chest to implant a device to aid the heart's pumping function.

"We discovered the right side of the heart was completely dead and non-functioning," said Madani. "While the left side was still working Wood could not live long term on the temporary assist device, so we put him on the heart transplant list right away."

On April 18th a heart became available and Wood underwent surgery once again. He was a lucky man. Over 88,000 people are currently awaiting organ transplants and each year thousands of people die waiting for a tissue match. Wood doesn't remember much over the three week period of waiting; medical staff kept him sedated while he battled infection and pain. But now, two months post-surgery, he feels an enormous elation at being alive and is appreciative of the ultimate gift his donor's family gave to him.

"I will be forever grateful to the donor and family for their courage and desire to help another individual during what can only be one of the most difficult of times," said Wood.

The Carlsbad resident has a lot of people to thank and he plans to do it on July 6 at Thornton Hospital. Usually families hold a Celebration of Life ceremony for when a person has passed. Wood's Celebration of Life will honor his second chance at life.

The development of the UCSD Heart and Lung Transplantation Program began with the first heart transplant procedure in February 1990 and has become one of the busiest lung transplant centers. As of July 1, 2005, the UCSD program has performed 169 heart transplants and 303 lung and lung-heart combination procedures.

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News Media Contact: Jeffree Itrich 619-543-6163

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