

# Headlee begins slow ascent at Hamilton

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PRESIDENT AND chief executive officer of Alexander Hamilton Life since 1972, Headlee began having breathing problems last summer shortly before he and his wife, Mary, visited two of their children attending college in Utah and Idaho.

He was treated for asthma, but followed his own feelings about the heart problem. Those feelings led him to Latter-day Saints Hospital in Salt Lake City, where doctors diagnosed congestive heart failure. The condition was caused by an infection, sometime during his life, that caused continued weakening of the heart muscle.

Headlee was admitted to the hospital immediately and heart surgery was sought through the UTAH-Cardiac Heart Transplant Program. It took nearly five weeks to find a suitable match. Recovery was complicated by gall bladder surgery and a liver infection.

A 22-year-old man's heart was transplanted into Headlee, who now takes anti-rejection drugs, which make the medical marvel possible.

Although he doesn't know the donor's name, Headlee said he wrote the New Mexico man's family a thank-you note and received an unsigned, return letter from the man's aunt who lives in Lansing.

"I'm grateful," he added. Headlee recuperated in a two-bedroom apartment in Utah, with one bedroom transformed into an office with all the essentials to keep him in daily communication with his Farmington Hills office.

HEADLEE MUST return every few weeks to Salt Lake City, so doctors can perform routine biopsies on the new heart, taking pieces of muscle to determine whether there is any sign of rejection. He's had 18 biopsies so far.

"It's a piece of cake," he said. With a new heart, Headlee has a 90 percent chance of surviving two years. Once beyond that, he could expect a nearly normal life span, said his cardiologists.

Headlee is beginning his life anew, setting his priorities on family, church activities, a limited work schedule of eight hours per day, and

a concentration on strategic planning and marketing for the national insurance company he heads.

"I've always tried to make the most out of every day," he said. "But never focused as much on priorities. I don't think I was preserved to focus on temporal things," he added. "I'm looking for ways to serve my community."

And as he shifts the focus on his life, Headlee speaks with confidence about his executive team at Alexander Hamilton. Company assets top \$2 billion.

"I've decided that the business runs very well with someone else handling the details," said the former Michigan State Chamber of Commerce chairman. "I think that's a real tribute to the people we have here. It won't be near the strain; I don't have to be an expert at everything."

"I spread myself pretty thin (before)."

POLITICAL AND personal friends have stayed in touch with Headlee throughout his recovery. "They're all

rallying around, saying 'we want you back stirring things up,'" he said.

(Gov. James) Blanchard called me one night and said, 'Now that you've got that 22-year-old heart, don't think about coming back here and running for governor.'"

"I told him, I didn't think I wanted to be that lonely."

Blanchard, a Democrat, defeated Headlee, a conservative Michigan Republican Party leader, in the 1982

gubernatorial election.

Although he has no future plans to seek political office, Headlee plans to stay busy with his community, his regional leadership role in the Mormon church, and maybe even push for better implementation of the 1978 Headlee Tax Limitation Amendment, named for his effort to keep property taxes from rising faster than general inflation.

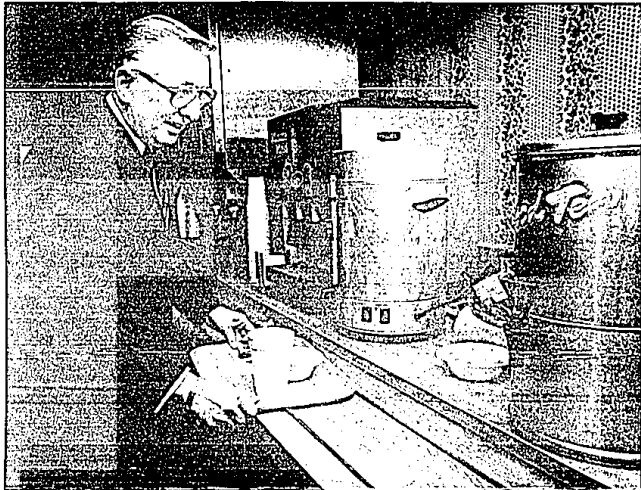
The old spark returns to his eyes

as he discusses the amendment and political processes that surround it.

"I guess it's a case of what do I want to do," he explained.

The Headlee Amendment "was a rational, reasonable approach. They've (state officials) stolen the money from schools through a school aid formula which is not constitutional."

"We ought to hold . . . their feet to the fire."



Richard Headlee moves through the cafeteria line during his lunch break at Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co. of America.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

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