

# Transplant gives man new outlook on life

BY DARR PERT TEMPLETON  
STAFF WRITER

"Look at me. I'm not Rock Hudson or anything but I'm here and I'm functioning and I'm enjoying life."

Michael Cosgriff's words of confidence and appreciation reflect the true joy he's feeling these days thanks to the brand new heart that's beating in his chest.

The fact that someone else had to lose their life in order to save his isn't lost on Cosgriff, however. The Farmington Hills resident is making sure he lives his life to the fullest while also spending many hours a week sharing his transplant story and the importance of organ donation with others.

As National Donor Sabbath Weekend is observed at churches throughout the country over the next few days, Cosgriff will be front and center at his Farmington Hills parish. He plans on planting himself behind a small table at St. Fabian Catholic Church and telling his tale following four different services scheduled through Sunday.

"For National Donor Sabbath Weekend we send out materials to all the clergy (via organ recipients and donor families) so they can speak out about the need for donors," explained Evelyn Cummings, Michigan Gift of Life Public Education coordinator. "The idea is that on this one weekend each year we hope churches can work something regarding organ donation into their sermons."

Cosgriff, 68, will be speaking with members of his parish for the second time. He believes his harrowing story and his happy ending can't be told enough.

### The battle begins

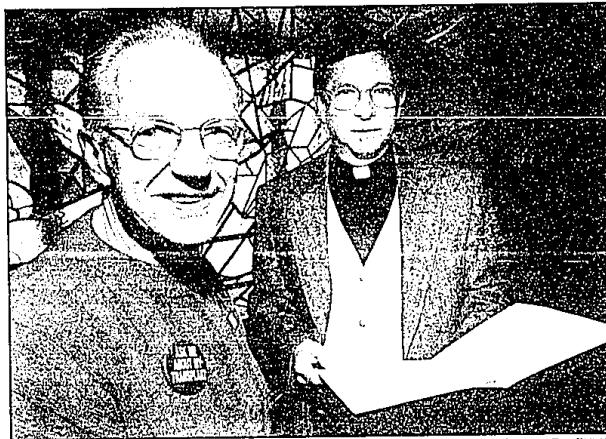
Cosgriff's journey to a new heart began in November 1990 when he first became ill and doctors determined he had suffered a minor heart attack. A cardiac catheterization was scheduled for the next day just as a precaution.

During the procedure, conditions went from minor to major when Cosgriff had a massive heart attack on the operating table. His lungs collapsed, his heart stopped and it took 10 hours to stabilize him as he went into a coma. When he woke up 12 days later he was weak, disoriented and 100 pounds lighter.

"I weighed about 246 pounds when I was admitted and when they put me on the scale two days after I came out of the coma I weighed 142," Cosgriff said.

In just a few short months, after he'd grown stronger and was tipping the scales at 175 pounds, Cosgriff underwent a triple bypass. He was feeling wonderful when his two-month checkup that July, but his positive attitude proved premature. Doctors discovered that so much damage had occurred during his second heart attack that he would need a heart transplant to survive.

Cosgriff was stunned to learn that only 48 per-



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL HEDGECOCK

Gift of life: Mike Cosgriff received a new heart in 1994 after being on a transplant list for three years. He and the Rev. Brian Chahala will talk about the importance of organ donations this weekend at St. Fabian's Church in Farmington Hills.

cent of his heart was actually functioning, and that number would soon dwindle.

"We were in shock," recalled Cosgriff. "I just thought, 'How could I feel so good but be so sick?'"

Within months Cosgriff was extremely ill. His strength had deteriorated and he was constantly being shipped to the hospital for intravenous medications to keep him going.

### The long wait

It was in early 1992 that he was finally formally evaluated and placed on the waiting list for a heart transplant. Doctors changed all of his medications around and for the next year Cosgriff was feeling OK.

"Believe it or not I actually felt pretty good for much of the first year I was waiting. I mean I was functional at least," Cosgriff said. "Plus, I'm a very determined person. I don't just throw in the towel."

The last year on the waiting list was horrendous for the whole family, including Cosgriff's wife, Audrey, and daughter, Kelly. He was spending a week out of every month in the hospital and grew weaker by the day as breathing

became more and more difficult.

"I couldn't put on my own shoes, I couldn't even tie them and all of that was real tough to go through," Cosgriff said. "Everything changed. You can't support your own family. My wife went back to work after 30 years as a housewife. We just reversed roles."

The life-saving call finally came for Cosgriff in the early morning hours of a bleak November day in 1994.

"The first two calls I got to come for the transplant were false runs," Cosgriff said. "By the time they called me the third time at four in the morning I didn't get excited because I didn't know if it would be a go."

On Nov. 29, 1994, Cosgriff saw "all his prayers and hopes answered" when a successful heart transplant was performed at Henry Ford Hospital. He has never been told much about his donor except that he was an 18-year-old man.

### The road back

Following the successful transplant surgery Cosgriff was home and recuperating in just nine days.

## Churches help spread organ donation message

BY DARR PERT TEMPLETON  
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The numbers are harrowing. So far this year, 137 patients have died in Michigan while waiting for organ transplants.

A movement aimed at trimming that list down to zero has churches across the country taking part in a National Donor Sabbath Weekend, running Friday through Sunday, Nov. 13-15.

The interfaith weekend presents a national opportunity for religious communities to share information about organ and tissue donation, and to give thanks for those who have given the gift of life.

Michigan Gift of Life sent out information about the special weekend to over 500 volunteer recipients and donor families, according to public relations coordinator Penny Colthurst.

"After we send the families the packets they, in turn, take them to their churches and parishes to encourage them to take part in the donor sabbath weekend," Colthurst said. "We don't really have a way of knowing how many take part but I think there are quite a few that include something in their sermon or church newsletter."

The list of ideas suggests churches consider having a trained volunteer speak during the service, staff a display in their vestibule, include a message about organ and tissue donation in their bulletin or newsletter or make donor registry cards available.

St. Fabian Catholic Church in Farmington Hills will allow longtime member and heart transplant recipient Michael Cosgriff to offer information and answer questions about organ donation this Sunday. It will be the second year in a row that Cosgriff, 68, is taking the lead in sharing the importance of organ donation with members of his parish.

A Farmington Hills resident, Cosgriff, endured two heart attacks, deteriorating health and three years on the donor waiting list at Henry Ford Hospital before undergoing a heart transplant in November 1994. He said the wait was worth each new day he now gets to spend with his wife, Audrey, and daughter, Kelly.

"That makes the world go around for me, right there," Cosgriff said. "And I give a lot of my time now to trying to educate people to consider organ donation."

Advances in medicine, including better drugs and the greater knowledge doctors have today make the transplant success rate much, much higher, Cosgriff said.

More than 60,000 people in the United States are waiting for an organ transplant, but the current rate of donation provides less than 20,000 organs a year. Thousands of waiting patients die each year before an organ

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