

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Artificial heart patient honored during American Heart Walk
Family celebrations, American Heart Walk mark one-year anniversary

Louisville, KY – A family party in Central City, the start of the American Heart Association Walk and a reception with Jewish Hospital and University of Louisville staff marked the one-year anniversary for Tom Christerson's AbioCor heart surgery.

Mr. Christerson underwent surgery Sept. 13, 2001, becoming the second person in the world to receive the AbioCor™ Implantable Replacement Heart, manufactured by ABIOMED, Inc., of Danvers, Mass. Mr. Christerson is now the longest living and only surviving AbioCor heart recipient. He is also the first artificial heart patient to go home.

Mr. Christerson began the weekend-long celebrations with a reception at Jewish Hospital Rudd Heart and Lung Center on Sept. 13. Among the guests were his family; University of Louisville surgeons Laman Gray, M.D., and Robert Dowling, M.D.; University of Louisville Research Lab staff; Frazier Rehab Institute therapists; and Jewish Hospital nurses, aides and nutritionists. The gathering gave the many people involved in the project the opportunity to celebrate with and honor Mr. Christerson.

The Tom Christerson and Family Nursing Scholarship established in his honor was also announced that day. The Grand Lakes Yacht Club established the scholarship to recognize the outstanding nursing care Tom and his family received while he was a patient at Jewish Hospital.

On Saturday, Sept. 14, Mr. Christerson joined the American Heart Association for its annual walk. Mr. Christerson was invited to walk by a team of nurses from the Jewish Hospital Telemetry Monitoring Unit, where he stayed for several weeks while recovering from his surgery. The team included Mr. Christerson, Jewish Hospital nursing staff, his friends and several members of his family, including his great-granddaughter Ellen Thomas Binkley. Together, the team sounded the horn to begin the walk at Kentucky Kingdom.

Mr. Christerson returned home to Central City for a Sunday celebration party with his family and friends. "We wanted to thank all of those who helped us through my dad's surgery and recovery," said his daughter, Patti Pryor. "Our friends visited us, kept us in their prayers and sent cards and e-mails. We wouldn't be celebrating this anniversary without their help and support."

His physicians also praised Mr. Christerson and his family.

“Tom and his family joined us in this journey a year ago today. I couldn’t be more pleased with the strides he’s made. He has a tremendous family, and together they’ve done great things. Thank you, Tom. We’re proud of you all,” Dr. Gray said.

“Tom is truly a hero. He has surpassed every goal we set when we started this project last year. He and his family have our utmost respect and admiration. They are all heroes. I am proud to know them, and to be a part of their lives,” said Dr. Dowling.

Mr. Christerson said he’s glad for the second chance he has been given, and he plans to continue enjoying his time with family and friends.

“I get up, I go have coffee, and then I go back home and just do whatever I choose. I get to go to the boat, I have a good wife that takes care of me, my daughter, my son, my grandchildren and great grandchildren, and I’m just scooting back and taking it easy. . . . It’s so much easier to live, breathe and I don’t know, I am looking forward to doing great things in life.”

For more information and updated photographs, please log onto www.heartpioneers.com.

Jewish Hospital is among the premier heart centers in the United States and, along with the University of Louisville, is dedicated to excellence in clinical care, research and education. University of Louisville surgeons at Jewish Hospital have performed many heart care “firsts,” including Kentucky’s first heart transplant, the world’s first heart transplant following the use of a Thoratec bi-ventricular assist device, the world’s first endoscopic saphenous vein harvest and the first ventricular remodeling in the region.

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