

What a difference a year makes.

Upon returning from her annual weekend trip to New York City in December 2005, travel agent Sheri Greenawalt decided she could no longer ignore the extreme fatigue she'd been battling for years.

Her December 2006 trip proved much more enjoyable following minimally invasive heart surgery that restored her energy level and her health.

Her family doctor diagnosed the 57-year-old Bedford-area woman with atrial fibrillation. The condition occurs when the electrical system of the heart misfires, causing the heart to flutter uncontrollably and beat inefficiently.

Blood flow becomes interrupted and leads to dizziness, fainting, fatigue and, in severe cases, blood clots that lead to strokes, according to Altoona cardiothoracic surgeon John Anastasi, M.D.

"The small incision, the shorter hospital stay, the quicker recovery are all better for the patient," Dr. Anastasi said. "It's not just about cosmetics. I'd never do it just for the cosmetics," he added, referring to the avoidance of the disfiguring incision needed for traditional open-heart surgery.

PROGRAM ALERT:

**Mini-Maze:
New Procedure,
Old Problem**
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for date, time.



Surgery fixes woman's heart problem, restores her energy level

A common condition

Atrial fibrillation is the second most common heart ailment behind coronary artery disease and affects 2.2 million Americans. The treatments for atrial fibrillation include drug therapy and external devices that put the heart back into proper rhythm, such as a pacemaker. These treatments carry significant side effects.

Those side effects and the thought of taking medications daily drove Sheri to seek a permanent cure for her fluttering heart. She had no qualms, she said, about being Dr. Anastasi's first patient to have this minimally invasive heart surgery — what is specifically called a Mini-Maze procedure for atrial fibrillation.

The Mini-Maze procedure is done using two smaller incisions instead of a single large incision down the center of the chest

and splitting the sternum. Two, two-inch incisions are strategically placed on either side of the chest so instruments can pass through into the chest cavity.

Use of the heart-lung bypass machine is also avoided during the Mini-Maze surgery, which further reduces the associated risks.

Special tests of the heart's electrical system are performed by Altoona Regional cardiologist Michael J. Larkin to isolate the specific pathways in the heart that are causing it to beat uncontrollably. The errant pathways are removed using mild, painless radiofrequency waves.

The procedure is more technically demanding of the surgeon, as he works with small instruments in a tiny space, Dr. Anastasi said, but he does it because of the higher patient satisfaction.

Back to work in a week

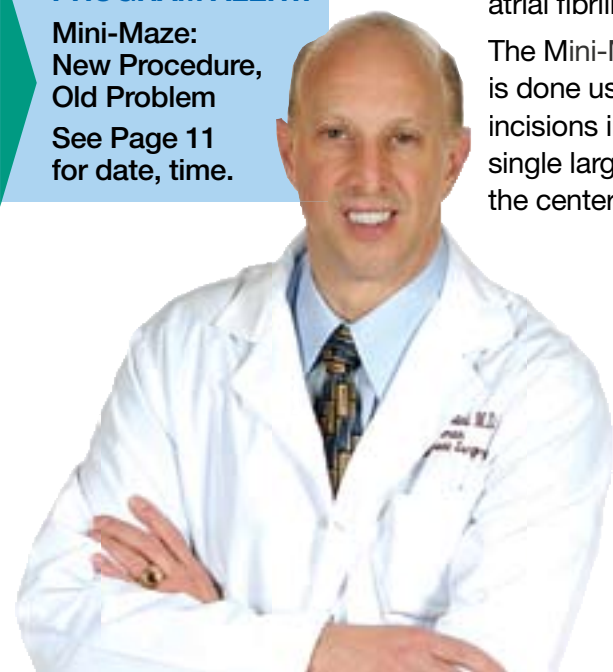
Another significant benefit of this less invasive procedure is the shorter recovery time. Sheri returned to work in a week. Had she undergone traditional open-heart surgery, her recovery would have taken six to eight weeks.

Another atrial fibrillation patient, John Clark, 72, of Everett, said he opted for the Mini-Maze procedure because he tired of the biweekly laboratory tests

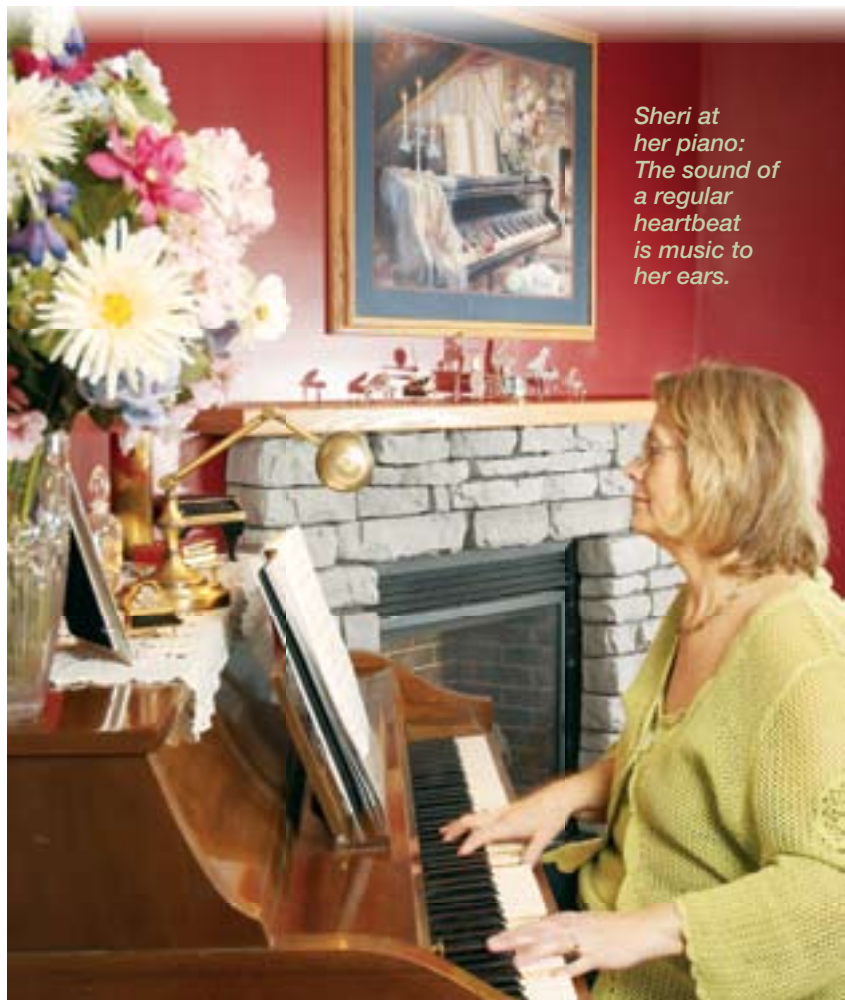
required to check the level of his blood thinning medication.

His heart has retained a normal rhythm since the operation and he hasn't needed the medication.

"I've had friends who have had open-heart surgery and their recovery has been a lot harder," he said, just five weeks post-surgery. "Energy-wise, I feel good."



John Anastasi, M.D., practices with Burt Fazi, M.D., and Arthur DeMarsico, D.O., at Cardiothoracic & Vascular Surgery of Altoona, 620 Howard Ave., Altoona, 889.2328.



*Sheri at her piano:
The sound of a regular heartbeat is music to her ears.*