

# Making a Big Difference

by Jon Caswell



Beth Beathard



Dolores Dries

It's safe to say that most members of MHI believe in serving those in need. This issue's Heart Heroes exemplify that spirit: Beth Beathard and Dolores Dries have been putting in many volunteer hours at the national office in Dallas. Director of Operations Janette Edwards says that without them, it would have been vastly more difficult to produce this year's convention in Orlando.

## Feeling Good Enough to Give Back

Beth Beathard is glad to feel good again. First diagnosed with cardiomyopathy and ventricular tachycardia in March 2007, she spent the next 18 months undergoing four ablations and two pacemaker/defibrillator surgeries plus multiple trips to the hospital and ICU stays. Her defibrillator shocked her heart back into rhythm seven times in nine months. When all that could not fix her heart condition, she was put on the transplant list. She got her great gift of life on November 8, 2008. "I will be eternally grateful to my donor and family," she said.

She became acquainted with MHI during her many hospital visits in 2007 and 2008. She called the national office looking for support, and Charlie Lincoln, Dallas Chapter 30 president, called her back. "I was terrified of what was happening to me," Beth said. "Charlie was my lifeline for months, mostly by phone at first." When she was well enough, she attended her first meeting. "The support I received there from Charlie and his wife Sally and Dolores Dries was what kept me going. Charlie always made a point of checking up on my husband Gary. After all, he was going through it, too."

Beth's heart transplant made a huge difference in her quality of life. "I was really surprised at how much better I felt immediately after surgery," Beth said. "I had color in my face for the first time in years. My family was amazed when they visited me in the hospital." (Beth and Gary have a son, Steven, age 25, daughter-in-law, Blaire, age 24, and a daughter, Bonnie, age 22.)

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– Beth Beathard

With her newfound energy, Beth decided to give back to the organization that had been the difference between being alone in her heart events and “having phenomenal support.” She called Janette Edwards and offered her time. Little did she know that she had a crucial skill.

“We badly needed someone who could run (the software program) ACCESS before convention,” Janette said, “and Beth is an expert. She was our lifesaver.”

Beth, who is on medical disability from a local university, hopes to return to work in the educational field or as a music therapist. A member of Chapter 30, she has been recently accredited as a Mended Hearts visitor. “My life before my illness was too busy to take time to give back to others. Being so ill and facing death numerous times made me realize how very precious every moment of life is. God has blessed me with a second chance of life through my new heart. And Mended Hearts is just one of the ways I can give back to others.”

### Generous Spirit

Dolores Dries has that special gift of generosity of spirit. Perhaps she always had it, or perhaps she learned it in 30 years of being an elementary school teacher in Dallas. She has given MHI National every Monday for the past three years. “She handles all our membership mailings and anything else we need,” Janette Edwards said.

Dolores’s path to MHI started with a stress test that showed coronary artery blockage. She had an angioplasty

in 1988 – “Stents were not common at that time,” she said. But after about nine weeks the chest and arm pain came back. So she returned for another angioplasty, but in nine more weeks the pain returned. “This time I had coronary bypass surgery, and after recuperation I returned to teaching,” Dolores said. A slow heart rate in 2005 resulted in a pacemaker, then in 2008 she had an AV node ablation and a new pacemaker.

Dolores joined Chapter 30 in 1989, and she has been deeply involved. “I found out about MHI at a health fair at a shopping mall while I was shopping,” she remembered. “I attended a meeting so I could learn more about heart disease and to know others who have gone through similar procedures.” In the past 20 years she has been the chapter president, vice president, PR chair and is currently the secretary. When she retired from teaching three years ago, she knew she would keep herself busy but didn’t have a plan for how. When Janette visited Chapter 30 and asked for help, Dolores answered. In addition to hospital visiting, Dolores volunteers at Medical City in Dallas. She is also an avid gardener: “Her yard is like a Monet watercolor,” Janette Edwards said.

Dolores enjoys visiting, particularly bringing relief to people in fear. “Last week a patient getting a pacemaker that day seemed so anxious. Her face lit up when I told her I had one. I was able to answer her questions and we both had a positive experience. I might feel tired or be busy with something else, but after visiting in the hospital I feel energized. I leave with a good feeling.”

Dolores’s heart event provided an important lesson for her. “Life is too short to be taken seriously. Things happen, but that doesn’t mean it is the end of the world. Life is better when I have a positive attitude. It was obvious that my dad had some heart problems, but in those days medicine had not advanced as much. I thank God I am living now with the medicines, heart procedures, technologies, computers, and the greater experience and wisdom of the doctors. MHI is a way for me to give back.” ❤️



Dolores Dries' colorful garden

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