

# Energizer Bunny of Toledo

by Jon Caswell



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**Jill** Snyder knows cardiovascular disease from top to bottom. She lived a long time with mitral valve problems before having replacement surgery in 1993. She signed up for MHI soon after, at the first meeting she attended, but joining didn’t end her relationship with CVD. Three years later, she was back in the hospital with a devastating stroke. She lost the use of her whole right side. “After a lot of physical therapy, everything slowly came back,” she says. “The only reminder now is my right leg — I have to go very slow when I’m climbing stairs or I tend to trip.”

Going slow is not something Jill, age 60, is temperamentally suited to do. “You know the old saying, ‘If you want something done, ask a busy person?’” says Jana Stewart, Jill’s RD in the Central Region. “I think it was first said in reference to Jill. She’s like the Energizer Bunny — she keeps going and going, getting things done.”

## What a Resumé

And if you look at her volunteer resumé, apparently she likes to work for free! Just within Chapter 100 in Toledo, Ohio, she’s been president, secretary, sunshine chair, publicity chair and newsletter editor. She’s also been a visitor for 14 years, visiting at four hospitals. Nationally she’s been an ARD and Central RD, presented numerous times at the convention and served on several committees, including the Mended *Little* Hearts committee. She started four new chapters when she was RD and also brought Mended *Little* Hearts to Toledo.

Even that’s not the whole resumé: During her years with MHI, she’s also been deeply involved in her local

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American Heart Association, where she was on the board of directors and the logistics committee for the Heart Walk for 13 years. She now serves on the Go Red For Women’s Auxiliary in Toledo, having been in the first class of Go Red Women in 2004. She works on Komen’s Race for the Cure to help fight breast cancer, and she’s also the altar guild director at her church, Trinity Episcopal Church in Toledo.

Oh, and did I mention that she works full time as a buyer for a manufacturing company and is a doting grandmother as well?

“When Jill sets her mind to something she truly believes in,” says Jana, “be it MHI, MLH, AHA, Komen, her church or her stroke support group, she’s a dynamo. She pulls energy from reserves that only she knows the secret to. I honestly don’t know how she accomplishes all the things that she sets out to do, but she does and in exemplary fashion.”

## Personally Speaking

Jill Snyder has been married twice, both times to the same man, and her heart surgery played a role in that. Jill had a mitral valve replaced not long after she and Wes, her husband, had been divorced after 21 years of marriage. She had known for a long time that she had mitral valve problems, but the surgery had to be done in a hurry because of insurance considerations — she was briefly between jobs and her medical insurance would soon run out. In her hour of need, Wes came through for her. “He was with me throughout the surgery and recovery,” she says, “and we were soon remarried.”

Wes well remembers that time. “When I found out that Jill was going to have heart surgery,” he says, “there was no question that I would be there for her. I knew as long as I was there, she wouldn’t be going anywhere.”

Evidently it was a good basis for a rematch. This time the Snyders have been together 14 years, the same length of time they’ve been members of Chapter 100. They have three grown children and two grandchildren.

“I joined Mended Hearts at my first meeting, a month after surgery,” Jill recalled. “A wonderful husband-wife team, Zeph and Alice Czelusta, visited me in the hospital. I was 43 and worried about how I would fare in the real world after this surgery. Zeph was in his 70s and told me his story. He was so reassuring. After I talked to them I felt strongly that if they were able to cope, I would be able to make it too! They visited me in my home after surgery. They made an imprint on my heart, and I knew that I had to help heart patients too.”



*Jill doing what she loves — visiting patients*

“Jill is quite an extrovert and I am an introvert,” says Wes. “After her operation, she accelerated fourfold at least, and she was even harder to slow down. She joined MHI and immediately got involved. Of course, that meant I had to also, and that involvement continues to this day. We’ve extended our family through MHI.”

## Second Chances

As with most survivors, living with heart disease and stroke has taught Jill many lessons. “I truly feel that I was given a second chance at life — a chance to do things that help others, including animals, to be kind and loving to my family and friends, to all those I meet. The colors of life were much clearer to me after surgery than they were before.

“Anger doesn’t last long with me anymore. I don’t owe anybody enough to waste my energy on being mad. The way the stroke affected my memory has been a godsend, because I can’t remember why I was mad at someone after a couple of hours,” she laughed.

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Through the years there have been many stories that have touched her heart as she's visited heart patients. "Recently I visited a mom in her 70s and a daughter in her 50s — they were sitting in a room waiting for the food tray. I introduced myself and told how



*The Snyder family*

I had mitral valve surgery 14 years ago. The mom's eyes lit up because she had just gone through the same thing. We started to talk and then a nurse came in and had instructions to give. They didn't want me to leave, but I promised I would come back after visiting the other patients. When I came back, their eyes lit up. The mother asked me several more questions. I spent a fair amount of time with them. As we parted, I wondered to myself, as I always do, 'Did I help her as much as she helped me?'"



*Jill receives an award from the Great Rivers AHA.*

"I loved being an officer in Chapter 100. You get the chance to meet the other members and to represent them in the community. When you're involved, you have the opportunity to make a difference to all the heart patients in your area."

In recognition of her years of service to the AHA, the former Ohio Valley Affiliate recently awarded Jill its 2006 Award of Excellence, which is the highest acknowledgment given by the affiliate. "Jill Snyder has been an inspiration," says Kris Pupos of the now-renamed Great Rivers Affiliate. "Her untiring work as a board member, Mended Hearts officer, founder of Mended *Little* Hearts of Glass City, and founding member of the Toledo Stroke Support Group, shows her passion for helping others who have experienced heart disease and stroke. The American Heart Association is fortunate to have such a wonderful friend as Jill."

"I really think Jill missed her true calling — sitting in an office all day instead of being out in the public following her heart, meeting and helping people," says Wes. "What really stands out in her volunteer work with MHI is the fact that she doesn't limit her goals. She just doesn't accept that something can't be accomplished if you set your mind to it."

"Jill is one of those extraordinary people who feels things very deeply," says Jana Stewart. "She cries during Hallmark card commercials. She encourages strangers to look for the brighter side of situations. Her dedication to everything she does and her love for the special people in her life seems to have no bounds."

"It has been so rewarding to work with so many wonderful MHI members from all over the country," Jill says. "My passion is helping others, and you can find those calls for help every day, everywhere." ❤️

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## Do Your Heart Good — Get Involved

"As RD, I always urged all our members to get involved with their chapters," says Jill. "Whether you're an officer or a member who participates in meetings and events, it's important to stay involved. Your heart receives so much good from being near other heart patients."