



Park Nicollet

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“PACEMAKER FOR THE BRAIN” HELPING PARKINSON’S PATIENTS

Deep Brain Stimulation helps one man flip burgers, golf again

ST. LOUIS PARK, Minn., (November 14, 2005) – Don Falk used to move a lot – too much, in fact. Don’s an energetic, active retiree, but he now takes great joy in being able to sit still. Surgeons recently implanted two small boxes below Don’s shoulder just under the skin. You can see them when he sits quietly and his shirt settles against his chest. You might think these are pacemakers, and, in a way, they are. But it’s not Don’s heart that needs help. It’s his brain.

Don has Parkinson’s disease, and among his most visible and frustrating symptoms were the loss of muscle control, tremors, and medication-induced dancing movements called dyskinesias. Don recently received Deep Brain Stimulation surgery, or DBS at Methodist Hospital. In May, surgeons placed small electrodes inside his brain and connected them to wires that run under his skin to neurostimulators – those “boxes” in his chest. “DBS delivers constant electrical stimulation to the part of the brain that controls movement,” said Martha Nance, MD, Don’s neurologist at Park Nicollet Struthers Parkinson’s Center. “It’s a way to help patients who are heading towards a more difficult stage of Parkinson’s, when medication begins to have a limited effect.”

After an overnight stay at Methodist Hospital and a couple weeks of recovery time at home, Don went to Struthers to be “turned-on” – to have his neurostimulators activated. Carrying a handheld device, a Struthers Center nurse switched on the device and made adjustments. “It made my right side perfect. I have very little tremor there now. It was my worst side.” Don now comes in every two or three weeks to have the neurostimulator fine-tuned. But he has a little fun too. “We joke that I’m in the ‘Cheers’ episode where people in the bar try to control Cliff with an electric zapper,” Don says. The phrase, “Dance, mailman, dance!” makes Struthers patients, nurses and therapists chuckle.

Don’s upbeat attitude and sense of perspective make him stand out. He finds joy in the small, daily victories of life, from tying his shoes, to flipping a hamburger, to playing golf. He takes none of it for granted. “I’d have the operation again in a second. It changed my life,” he says. Don has the amazing ability to balance the challenges of his disease with a positive outlook and sense of humor.

Struthers Parkinson’s Center’s own sense of balance puts it at the leading edge of Parkinson’s treatment. In addition to providing DBS surgery and the latest in drug therapy, a multidisciplinary team of dedicated nurses, rehabilitation therapists, and social workers works closely with patients throughout the course of their illness. Nationally known for its approach to Parkinson’s disease care, education, and research, Struthers has earned its recognition as a National Parkinson Foundation Center of Excellence.

For more information, visit www.parknicollet.com/methodist/parkinsons

Struthers Parkinson’s Center is part of Park Nicollet Health Services, an integrated health care system that includes Methodist Hospital, Park Nicollet Clinic, Park Nicollet Foundation and Park Nicollet Institute. The Struthers Center, opened in 1995, serves as a resource for patients and their families throughout the upper Midwest and has been designated as a Center of Excellence of the National Parkinson Foundation.