



CHICAGO HEIGHTS ♦ OLYMPIA FIELDS

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St. James Hospital and 2 BigHearts Foundation Team Up to Fight Heart Disease in Women

**February is American Heart Month
Heart Disease the #1 Killer of Women**

Note: Interviews available with Jim Clarke, 2 BigHearts founder, and St. James Hospital clinical staff and cardiologists. Photo opportunity at Free Heart Screening February 3.

Olympia Fields, IL – Imagine two sisters, both under the age of 50, both appear healthy, both suddenly and simultaneously stricken with a serious cardiac event. Sally Czechanski, 49, and her sister Gigi Clarke, 44, formerly of Lansing, IL, suffered from undiagnosed cardiomyopathy, or enlargement of the heart muscle. Both sisters died just 90 minutes apart. Sadly, awareness of their conditions could have prevented their deaths.

Today, three years after their deaths, Gigi's husband Jim Clarke is dedicated to increasing awareness of heart disease in women, with the ultimate goal of preventing unnecessary deaths. As founder of the 2 BigHearts Foundation, he works with the healthcare community to educate individuals and families about the causes and prevention of heart disease in women. This February, the Foundation is working with St. James Heart and Vascular Institute, part of St. James Hospital and Health Centers, to provide free heart screenings for area women.

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St. James Heart and Vascular Institute

Add One

“If you had seen my wife or her sister, you never would have thought either had heart disease,” Clarke said. “If these two women didn’t have a clue, then nobody has a clue.”

Clarke wants women to know that heart disease is the number one killer of women and he wants them to take action through diagnostic screenings to determine if they have risks.

Working with the St. James Heart and Vascular Institute, free heart screenings are available for women who have never been diagnosed with heart disease and have not previously seen a cardiologist. The screenings will take place over two days, with a cholesterol/glucose test January 27 followed by a series of diagnostic screenings February 3.

Women interested in participating in the Free Heart Screening program should call to schedule an appointment at (708) 679-2010.

According to Barbara Zeng Kwasny, Nurse Practitioner and Manager of the Cardio-Pulmonary Rehabilitation Department of the St. James Heart and Vascular Institute, the screenings will help women determine if they are at risk or show signs of heart disease.

“In this day and age, we have more opportunities to prevent heart disease and have the best potential to have the best health possible by identifying the risks and making lifestyle changes,” Kwasny said. “As women, we need to be proactive in identifying our risks.”

Kwasny went on to say that cardiomyopathy, which led to Gigi and Sally’s deaths, is not easily identifiable because the warning signs can pass under the radar. “If a person is keeping up with their healthcare, a warning sign can lead to further screenings identifying the disease,” she said.

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St. James Heart and Vascular Institute

Add Two

“It’s very generous of Jim Clarke and the 2 BigHearts Foundation to work with St. James and provide this extensive screening,” Kwasny said. “We hope each of the women who participate will learn more about their heart health.”

Clarke said the work with the Foundation and hospitals like St. James has been rewarding because they have been successful, especially through screening programs, at raising awareness of the risks of heart disease in women. Clarke encourages all women to take the time to review their health priorities and consult their doctors about their heart health.

“Through the work of the Foundation, Gigi and Sally’s hearts beat on, inspiring us all, reminding us that through tragedy, the greatest hopes can be born,” Clarke said.

Kwasny encourages women who can’t participate in the two-day screening to take the free “HEARTaware” Risk Evaluation available on the St. James web site at www.stjameshospital.org. It’s a seven-minute assessment that helps determine a person’s risk profile. The completed evaluation will be reviewed by a St. James nurse practitioner to determine risk status and the need for further screening.

About St. James Hospital

Established in 1911, St. James Hospital and Health Centers is a two-campus healthcare delivery system serving the Chicago Southland region. With hospitals in Chicago Heights and Olympia Fields, St. James provides advanced cardiac and cancer services, and a wide range of programs and services that respond to community needs. Through the ministry of the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration, St. James has delivered high-quality healthcare for more than 90 years. St. James was recognized by Solucient as one of the nation's 100 Top Cardiovascular Hospitals and by the Center for Innovation in Healthcare Facilities as one of the Top 10 Most Innovative Facilities in the country.

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