

# Enjoying Lake Life again

## with a new heart valve

**M**y cardiologist said I'd know when it was time." Gene Whitfield had lived with a heart murmur for seven years, knowing that he might someday need a valve replacement. That day had come.

"Two years ago, I was walking up the hill from my boat dock to our lake house," he said. "I had some shortness of breath and I just didn't feel right."

He told his wife, Lynn, he needed to go back to see his cardiologist at Ascension Saint Thomas in Nashville.

"My doctor said I might live the rest of my life and never need a valve replacement. So, we monitored it every year."

But that day at Kentucky Lake, his aortic valve had closed to the diameter of a toothpick. The valve had narrowed over time, keeping blood from flowing freely, a condition called aortic stenosis.

It was clear he would need a new valve, but his heart team told him about an alternative to open-heart surgery. A minimally invasive procedure called TAVR, or transcatheter aortic valve replacement, delivers a new valve to the heart through a blood vessel in the leg, rather than cutting through the chest.

At that time, TAVR was approved only for patients at moderate to high risk for complications from open-heart surgery. Gene didn't qualify, so he entered the Partner 3 clinical trial for low surgical risk TAVR using the Edwards Sapien 3 transcatheter heart valve at Saint Thomas West.



"You talk about the good Lord taking care of you. I got selected for the TAVR procedure," said Gene. "I think I got really lucky."

M. Andrew Morse, MD, the interventional cardiologist who performed Gene's procedure, said, "The FDA recently approved TAVR for low-risk patients as well. Now we're able to give more people this minimally invasive option, with the goal of much shorter wait times."

Though thrilled with that option, Gene still had questions.

"Basically, they held my hand, explaining how they would do the procedure," he said. "I asked Dr. Morse, 'Just how many of these have you done?' He told me 'about 370.' Rest assured, Saint Thomas is where you want to be."

Fast forward two years. Living an active life, Gene is back on the water, hosting friends and family in the Land Between the Lakes. He remembers TAVR as "the greatest thing that's ever happened to me."

"The Lord blessed me, and life is good."

**Looking for the right heart care for you?  
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