

A Heartwarming Sendoff at OSF Heart of Mary

OSF HealthCare Mission Partner Dave Ford hadn't seen his wife Darla for 38 days. During that time, the 64-year-old Urbana man was in a fight for his life, recovering from the devastating effects of COVID-19.

Dave's care included seven weeks in the hospital at OSF HealthCare Heart of Mary Medical Center in Urbana, including 15 days on a ventilator. Dr. Rizan Hajal was part of his care team. He says when Dave's sickness was at its peak, it wasn't guaranteed he would ever come off of the ventilator.

"The odds were stacked against him, to be honest with you," said Dr. Hajal, a critical care and pulmonary medicine physician at OSF Heart of Mary. He continued, "Especially because he came in during the early wave of the pandemic, which means we were still not sure where those cases that are so sick would lead. So it's so wonderful to see that it led for him to recover and go home."

"I had the easy part, I just slept. God did everything else, and people's prayers. And I know my Mission Partners that I've known all these years, they weren't going to let me go. They were working as hard as they could to keep me," reflected Dave.

Despite the stacked odds, Dave prevailed. He grew stronger, came off the vent, and on April 30 he received a hero's send-off from his friends and Mission Partners at OSF Heart of Mary. Hundreds of them lined the halls to cheer Dave along on his road to COVID-19 recovery.

Dave has served on the Central Transport team at OSF Heart of Mary for nearly 19 years. He calls his Mission Partners his second family, but even he was still surprised and overwhelmed at the show of support he received on the day of his release.

"I come out of the elevator and the first thing I said was, 'do you guys want to see me cry?' And then as we come down the hall and then turn the corner, there were people all clear down to the lobby. I was like, this is incredible," recalled Dave. "It shows you how much people love each other at the hospital, and Mission Partners care about each other."

Dave says every turn down the winding hallways was a shock; more and more people were waiting to cheer him on. But it was one moment that stands out like none other – the first time he saw his wife of 34 years, after more than seven weeks without her by his side.

"That was the best. I was wanting them to stop the chair so I could get up and give her a hug. I mean, 38 days not being able to touch her or hold her. So yeah, I was wanting them to stop the wheelchair so I could get up and get to her. It was quite a moment," said Dave.

Dave is now symptom free and is recovering at home. While in quarantine he is still receiving support from OSF HealthCare providers, including physical and occupational therapies at home.

He says he reflects often about the people and families left in the wake of COVID-19 without the same level of support that he has experienced.

"I just can't imagine going through this alone. And I feel sorry for people that's lost loved ones over this, and you know, it's terrible."

For his care team, Dave is nothing short of an inspiration.

“It’s a heavy price for the community to pay with this pandemic, and Dave’s story is very inspiring. To see somebody who has been to the worst side of the virus and then recover very slowly, this is very inspiring,” remarked Dr. Rizan.

For now, Dave is happy at home with his wife, the woman he met on a blind date decades ago, and who he asked to marry that very first night.

For more information on novel coronavirus (COVID-19), including frequently asked questions, please visit the OSF HealthCare COVID-19 digital health hub: www.osfhealthcare.org/covid19/.

If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and it is not an emergency, use one of the digital care options offered by OSF. You can connect through Clare, a digital assistant available through the OSF website, or by calling the 24/7 nurse hotline at 833-OSF-KNOW (833-673-5669).