

Trojan state champ in biggest battle yet

The 'Larry Bergmann's got a GOOD heart' fundraiser to be held Feb. 25 in Lawler

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The day Lawler's Larry Bergmann stepped onto the podium to become Turkey Valley's first-ever state champion wrestler was a day he'll never forget. It was one for the highlight reel.

On the other end of the spectrum was the day his heart had to be shocked 26 times to get it out of a lethal rhythm. Luckily, he doesn't remember much of *that* day.

Nine years after that major heart attack — after which the doctors told him his heart would last about 10 years — Bergmann's heart function became so poor doctors installed a heart pump to buy him time until he was able to get a heart transplant, which he did in November of 2016.

At 52 when the major heart attack occurred, Bergmann's ability to continue his employment at Kohlmeyer, Inc. was limited, and while he has insurance, the expenses are huge.

"How fortunate we are to live in small town Iowa where we look out for each other," said a news release promoting the "Larry Bergmann's got a GOOD heart" benefit.

The event — hopefully with Bergmann in attendance — will be held on Feb. 25 at the Starlite Ballroom in Lawler (formerly Chip's). A free-will donation meal will be served from 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Other activities will include a silent auction, a live auction starting at 7 p.m., raffles, and more.

"It's like putting a new furnace into an old house," Bergmann quipped during his cardiac therapy Wednesday morning. But the new furnace was working well. A measure of the heart's pumping ability — the ejection fraction — is normally 55 or above. "I was at 10 at one point, now I'm at 51."

"This is one motivated guy right here," said Mercy-New Hampton's Marianne Kurash,



Dorothy Huber/Tribune

While walking on the treadmill, Larry Bergmann visits with Marianne Kurash, Cardiac Rehabilitation Coordinator at Mercy Medical Center-New Hampton.

Cardiac Rehabilitation Coordinator. "Attitude is everything."

Ten years ago, Bergmann thought he was a pretty healthy 52-year old. He was active in his job, had no high blood pressure and wasn't overweight, but he did have two things working against him — his family history and tobacco use.

"Some of the things, you are dealt the cards," said Kurash. "Family history, age - it used to be that more men had heart attacks than women, but now that women are in higher stress jobs and more are smoking, that's leveling off somewhat."

Bergmann didn't smoke, but he did chew. "My doctor told me that's the fastest way into your bloodstream, under your tongue. I had tried giving it up three times, but it was hard."

But the major heart attack and the time spent in the hospital did the trick.

The Turkey Valley 1973 graduate didn't have the typical symptoms of a heart attack. No pain in the jaw, none in the chest or arm. His pain was in

between the shoulder blades. "I knew all the other signs, but not that one."

On Nov. 21 in 2006 the pain was so bad, Bergmann went to the Emergency Room at New Hampton and it was there he had his heart attack. And apparently it wasn't his first one.

"I woke up and the doctor asked me when I had my first attack, I had one and didn't even realize it."

Rushed to Mason City, Bergmann had stints put in. "I survived the heart attack, but when they put the stints in, the heart didn't know what to do with all that oxygen."

It was then that the doctors had to shock his heart to get it back into its rhythm. "I think 26 times was some kind of record over there. I guess the doctor said 'he's too young and too healthy' so they went through the extra effort and I really appreciate that."

He doesn't remember the first eight days after that. "I had pretty much hit rock bottom," he said. "They told my brother

I was down to a 10 percent chance of survival."

But had he still been in Lawler when the heart attack occurred, he would probably not have been talking while on the treadmill Wednesday.

"I would rather have people come in for 10 false alarms rather than stay home that one time," Kurash noted. "Time is muscle."

But Bergmann did lose 3/4 of the muscle in his left ventricle, and survived that way until he had the heart pump installed.

"That saved my life, actually," he said of the pump. "But I was lucky to go nine years with my heart as damaged as it was."

The internal heart pump was run by a battery pack, which Bergmann had to wear, and at night he would plug the pump into a power outlet.

"Being on the pump moved me up the list for a transplant." On Nov. 17, 2015 he went on the list, and a nearly year later the transplant took place with 12 hours in surgery and a staff