

Sun will mix  
with clouds.  
High 82, low 63.  
More weather, 6C

# BUCKS

DETOUR



## Delays in Bucks

Woodhaven Road,  
Bensalem, Philadelphia, lane  
restrictions between Route 13  
and Route 1, 9 a.m.- 3 p.m.,  
8 p.m.-5 a.m., indefinitely.

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# Patient makes heartfelt comeback

By SHAILA DANI  
COURIER TIMES

When Bill Coillot was 38, he was a happy and healthy man who ran 25 miles a week. He had a good job in California, where he lived with his wife and 6-year-old son. He had no clue his heart was a ticking bomb.

It was that year, 1988, that Coillot learned his cholesterol level was just below 800, when a level of 200 is considered high. His doctor told him he was "a heart attack waiting to happen."

He remembered his older brother's heart attack and death at 36, and began asking his parents questions about their medical history. His mother could not remember any male in her family living past the age of 40, and a cardiologist realized Coillot had a genetic predisposition to dangerously high levels of cholesterol.

One year later, Coillot suffered his first heart attack and had his first bypass surgery. It was then that he was first told he

did not have long to live. It was the beginning of a long battle with heart disease.

"There was anger at this point," said Coillot, who had to stop working because of his health. "There was the typical male ego at this time — you are supposed to be the breadwinner and now you are reduced to not being able to do anything."

After suffering a small stroke, Coillot resigned himself to becoming "Mr. Mom." His wife went back to work while Coillot took his son to soccer practice and helped him with his homework. In the meantime, he was hospitalized frequently for procedures related to clogged arteries. Coping with his health condition and inability to work led to depression.

In 1996, Coillot had another minor heart attack, and doctors told him he needed another bypass. After the successful

See COILLOT, 2C



Bill Coillot is able to smile again thanks to Dr. Arathi Rao's help. Dr. Rao (right) has helped Coillot battle depression and stress caused by multiple heart attacks and heart ailments. KIM WEIMER / COURIER TIMES

2C

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LOCAL

## Coillot: Helping the heart through the mind

From Page 1C

surgery, sutures burst in his heart. Doctors cut Coillot open again, not realizing the anesthesia had worn off. Coillot could not tell physicians he was awake due to a number of tubes in his throat. He passed out from the pain.

"It was like molten lead being poured in your chest," he said.

Three days later, Coillot suffered another heart attack. "This was one of the lowest points in my life," he said.

Prayer and his family helped him get through. In 1997, Coillot was put on an experimental medicine which helped his heart beat easier, and the family moved to Newtown in 2000 when his wife was transferred at work.

"I was having a ball, being in

a new place," said Coillot, who enjoyed visiting historic sites in the area. But three years later, he suffered his fourth heart attack.

Depression set in again, and he rarely felt like leaving the house. A cardiologist told him to see a psychologist, but he wanted to tough it out on his own.

Finally, early this year, Coillot realized he needed help. He went to see Dr. Arathi Rao, a cardiac psychologist with a private practice in Newtown.

Stress and depression are common side effects in patients coping with heart disease, she said. Patients frequently are dealing with fear of death, guilt they are burdening their families, hopelessness and helplessness.

Recent studies are showing that hormones the body produces when stressed can lead to

greater risk of heart disease, putting depressed heart disease patients at an even greater risk for further incidents.

"If you don't address the psychological issues, there are two consequences: you are prone to further cardiac events, and your quality of life remains poor," said Dr. Rao, who began to focus on cardiac patients after her husband underwent a quintuple bypass in 1999.

The doctor places equal importance on a patient's physical, mental and spiritual state, and uses a combination of guided imagery and cognitive behavior therapy in her treatment.

For example, she has helped train Coillot to picture himself putting down bags of luggage — which he said represent the burden of his health— whenever he

begins to feel anxious or hopeless. He chose this imagery himself.

"I feel mentally stronger than I have in a long time," said Coillot, who takes 13 heart and cholesterol-lowering medicines every day. The 53-year-old has a cholesterol level of 140, and doctors are no longer telling him he has only a short time to live.

He plans to share the story of his battle now, he said, because he wants to encourage others in similar situations to seek counseling. He will tell other patients not to give up, to fight on — for their families and for themselves. "Giving up on yourself could lead to that next big heart attack that you might not survive," he said. He adds, "don't try and fight it all on your own."

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