



Speck, Bob

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'I was scared' says Mayor Bob

BY MIKE SOLOMON
City Editor

"I was scared, but the decision had been made that they were going to do it. There was no backing out then," Mississauga Mayor Bob Speck told us, grinning at the remembrance of the fear he had had about his heart transplant operation.

He sat upright in his straight-backed chair. Behind him stood his wife, Enid, and sons John, 29, and Paul, 17.

Fifteen of us were jammed into the little ante-room at the end of the ward at St. Michael's Hospital. Our tissue face masks rustled every time we spoke. Mayor Bob struggled with his a little, then removed it. It was hot under the television camera lights.

He endured the all-revealing lights, the heat and the questions for about

20 minutes before the Monday press conference was called to a halt by Rita Halsall, the hospital's information officer, who arranged the event.

We expected him to be wheeled into the room but he walked in, erect, escorted by his family and Mrs. Halsall, blinked a couple of times under the glare of the lights, grinned broadly, waved a hand and said: "hi"

It was difficult to believe that only four weeks earlier, to the day, he had undergone one of the most major operations known in today's medical circles.

Wearing a brightly-colored robe and a cheerful smile, he sat down to face our questions. Cameras whirred and clicked.

"How long have you been out of bed?" asked one astonished news woman.

"Oh, I've been out for

a couple or three weeks, now," the mayor replied. "It's a great feeling."

He told us of the trying times he had while awaiting the heart transplant operation, the decision for which had been made last September.

SECRET

That turned out to be the best-keep secret local government circles have come across in the decade and a half Mayor Speck has been on council.

He talked of going back, saying he intends to turn up at a meeting of Mississauga town council, of which he is head, sometime in March, to be reinstated.

"I'm not going to wait until the last minute," he told us. "It might snow, or I might not feel too good, so I'm going early."

He said he did not find it easy waiting for a new heart, adding: "I was nervous. I was scared."

He told us: "I kept wondering about it. Things go through your mind. Then, one day they told me it was going to happen."

He mused for a moment, then said: "I've never felt better in my life. I feel 10 years younger than I have for a long while."

How did he feel about his new heart?

"Well, I had an organ in my body that was giving out. They put another one in. Psychologically, it's something that works. I don't feel any different, really, than I ever did.

"I feel I'm a very lucky man," he told us.

He said he had met the

father of 14-year-old heart donor Richard Wolniewicz and told us "it's our (town council's) intention to make a park on the lake where not only the people of Mississauga, but the people of Toronto and other parts of the province will be able to use it and see it. It will be for the boy."

He said the park would be about 25 acres and would include a beach area.

Leaning back in his chair, with the old, familiar twinkle in his eye, he let out a little sigh and proclaimed: "It's great to be alive"

He had some advice for people who might be on the waiting list for heart transplants.

'BE DETERMINED'

"You must be determined that you want to live if you want a heart transplant," he said seriously.

"Many people have waited but have not waited long enough. You've got to be determined."

Saying he had struck up a close relationship with Charles Perrin Johnson, 54, a retired engineer, Canada's 13th heart recipient, and the Rev. Edward Madigan, a Roman Catholic priest, who received his new heart in April, 1970, the mayor chuckled and added: "we have a three-member club. It's a little exclusive, I'd say."

He told us, however, that some time in the summer the exclusive group would be having a fourth member, a person from Montreal, to make up a fourth for cards.

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