



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Judge Parsons returns to bench full-time after heart transplant

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ROMNEY, W.Va. – It was just a little over four months ago that Twenty-Second Judicial Circuit (Hampshire, Hardy, and Pendleton Counties) Judge Charles E. Parsons received a heart transplant at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Md. Working hard on his recovery, he returned to the bench full-time on Nov. 5.

Now 68, he has had a heart condition for more than 25 years, but it was not until he consumed an entire jar of pickles that his situation became critical. Pickles are full of salt, and when he went to visit his daughters in California during Thanksgiving last year, for the first time he noticed swelling in his legs, ankles, and feet. Thus began an odyssey which initially took him to the Heart Institute at West Virginia University, and then Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, where he spent a week.

West Virginia does not have a heart transplant facility, but the state does have a contract with the University of Kentucky to perform the procedure on West Virginia residents. Because of the logistics, however, the University of Kentucky was not a viable alternative for Judge Parsons. He was considering the University of Virginia or returning to Pittsburgh, but in a bizarre twist of fate, his insurance company realized that since he resided in the Eastern Panhandle, Johns Hopkins in Baltimore was a preferred provider and in his network.

When he arrived at Johns Hopkins, he could scarcely walk more than 30 yards. Always determined and in conjunction with excellent medical care, they were able to “put Humpty Dumpty back together again,” he said. Moreover, he engaged in an intense physical regimen, which included a two-mile walk with nurses every day. He was in such good shape, in fact, that after his surgery on June 26 he was released from the hospital on July 6.

“I’m sort of the miracle recovery guy to them, mainly because I was focused and understood the significance of my circumstances,” Judge Parsons said.

The most difficult part was being restricted to one floor of the hospital, as his family patiently waited 85 days for a donor and a successful surgery. During his hospital stay, his spirits were buoyed by more than a hundred cards, dozens of phone calls, and by the frequent visits of friends.

His wife, Beth, whom he calls a saint, has assumed caretaking responsibilities, and she affectionately says, "I'm driving Mr. Daisy."

While he won't run for re-election in 2016, Judge Parsons will finish his current term as promised. During his absence, Senior Status Judges Thomas H. Keadle and Andrew N. Frye, Jr., handled his docket. Judge Parsons says he is extremely grateful to them and the West Virginia Supreme Court.

Upon reflection, Judge Parsons says, "It is a sobering thought to see your own mortality in front of you. Life is precious, and I would suggest we make every effort to hold on to it." Feeling blessed, Judge Parsons says he can now look forward to his retirement.

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