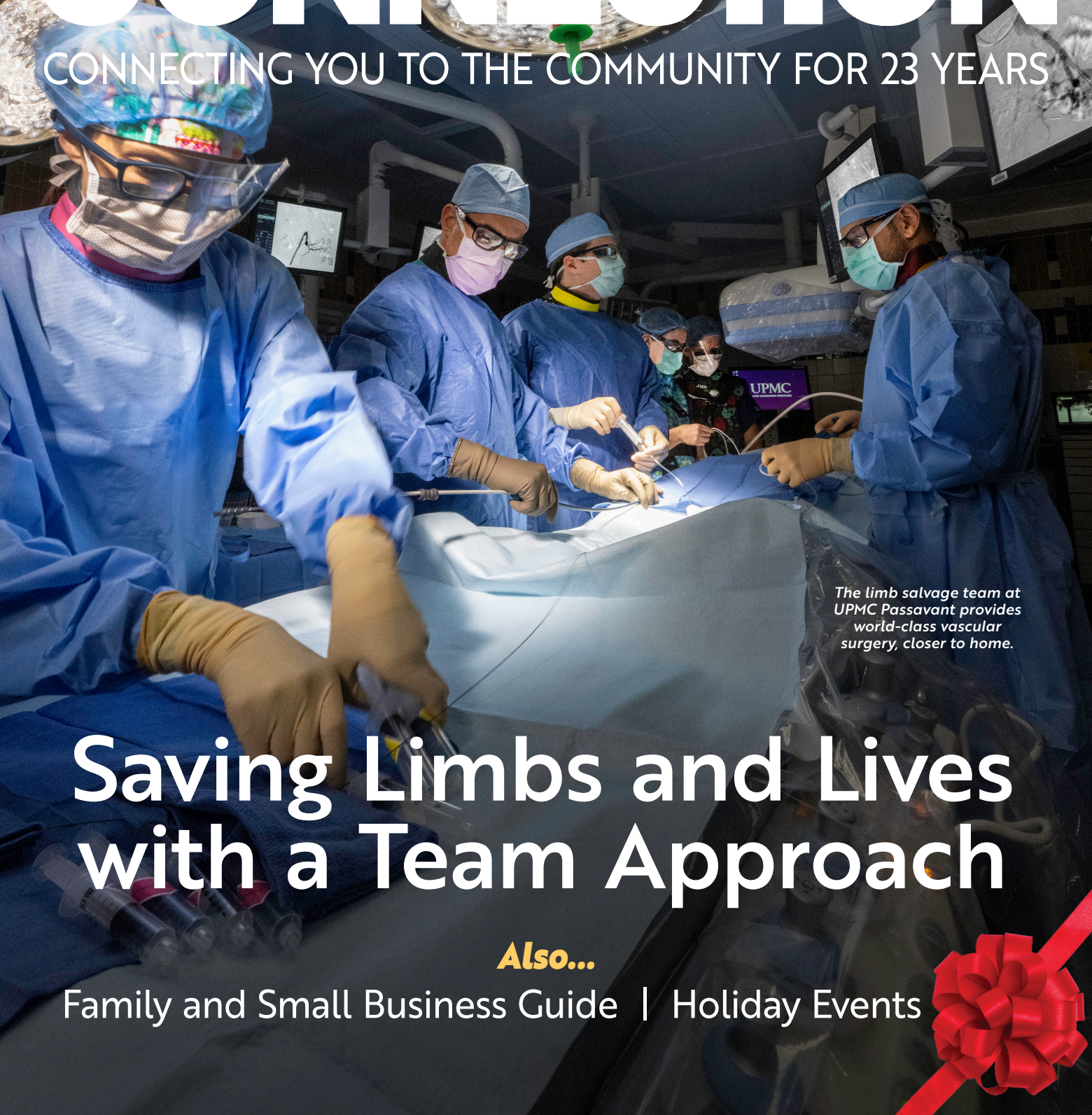


NORTHERN CONNECTION

November
2022

CONNECTING YOU TO THE COMMUNITY FOR 23 YEARS



The limb salvage team at UPMC Passavant provides world-class vascular surgery, closer to home.

Saving Limbs and Lives with a Team Approach

Also...

Family and Small Business Guide | Holiday Events



NORTHERN CONNECTION

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November

10

The collaborative limb salvage team pictured from left to right: Amber Dobrowski, R.T(R)(CT)(VI), Michael Madigan, MD, Georges Al-Khoury, MD, Karim Salem, MD, Amanda Phillips, MD, Julie Capo, RN, Sean Cardell, R.T(R)(VI), Lauren Tankesley, PA-C, and Judith Stone, R.T(R)(VI).

NC Features

- 7 The Foster Love Project
- 8 Family & Small Business Profiles
- 27 Songbird Artistry Brings Creativity and Inclusivity to Pittsburgh
Bronwyn Wain
- 29 "Talking Turkey" Down on the Farm *Ron Eichner*
- 30 Home Guide

Health & Wellness

- 10 Cover Story: Saving Limbs and Lives with a Team Approach
UPMC
- 12 Feeling Blue After a Viral Infection *Belinda Burchick, RPh, BPharm*
- 16 Celebrating 40 Years of Excellence in Senior Living
Sherwood Oaks

Kids & Education

- 18 School Movers & Shakers

Advertorials

- 1 Peripheral Neuropathy Sufferers Have Hope *Dr. Shawn Richey*

In Every Issue...

- 4 Movers & Shakers
- 6 Mover & Shaker of the Month: The Boy Next Door
By Paula Green
- 26 Support Our Troops: Honoring Our Veterans This Veterans Day *Paula Green*
- 20 MOM2MOMS: November – We Are Family, Get All Your Sisters and Brothers Around You!. *Sofya Stearns*
- 21 From the Editor: Prisoners of Our Own Devices *Janice Lane Palko*
- 22 2022 Holiday Events
- 28 Trivia Connection: Notable November Trivia
Paula Green



UPMC Passavant limb salvage program patient Janet Collins poses with her horse, Stormy, on her farm in Mercer County.



Georges Al-Khoury, MD, with Janet at UPMC Passavant-McCandless.

Saving Limbs and Lives with a Team Approach

This content is sponsored by UPMC.

At UPMC Passavant, vascular surgeons are teaming up with other specialists to reduce amputations through a coordinated limb salvage program.

What Is Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD)?

Peripheral artery disease – a form of peripheral vascular disease – is the narrowing or blockage of the vessels that carry blood from the heart to your limbs. The most common cause is a buildup of plaque in the arteries that restricts blood flow.

PAD commonly happens in the legs, since they're farthest from the heart and those blood vessels are smaller.

The primary symptom of PAD is leg pain and cramping while walking, although some people don't experience any pain. More advanced symptoms include leg or foot pain at rest, skin discoloration or coolness, and toe and foot sores that do not heal.

In more severe cases, lack of blood flow can cause gangrene. Once tissue dies, it must be removed, sometimes through total amputation.

Janet Collins loves the outdoors. Her greatest joys are riding horses and zipping around her 20-acre Mercer County farm on her utility terrain vehicle (UTV). But complications from diabetes and hypertension led to the development of peripheral artery disease (PAD) – a circulatory problem that narrows the arteries and reduces blood flow. That led to the amputation of Janet's lower left leg in 2019.

Three years later, she was in danger of losing her right leg when her path led her to the limb salvage team at UPMC Passavant, which is part of the UPMC Heart and Vascular Institute.

Lifelong Complications and Poor Circulation

Diagnosed with diabetes in 1975, Janet struggled with lifelong complications, including poor circulation and nonhealing wounds. In 2019, she was diagnosed with PAD in her legs and feet.

"A simple blister on my toe wreaked havoc," she says. Despite several surgeries to improve blood flow, she developed gangrene (dead tissue), lost her toes, and eventually her left leg via an above the knee amputation.



Georges Al-Khoury, MD, chief of Vascular Surgery at UPMC Passavant

Treating Vascular Disease at UPMC Passavant

In 2022 when she saw **Georges Al-Khoury, MD**, chief of Vascular Surgery at UPMC Passavant, Janet had developed nonhealing sores on her right foot – a gangrenous toe and a large, gaping abscess on her ankle. She had seen multiple doctors, been to various hospitals, and had numerous procedures.

“The pain was terrible. And I was so afraid of losing my other leg,” says Janet, 65.

“I told Dr. Al-Khoury I had to get back on my horse. That’s my passion,” she says. “I needed this leg. It meant I could maintain my independence, be active, and be outdoors. It meant I could balance on a horse, transfer to my UTV, and ride around our property.”

A Multidisciplinary Approach

Led by Dr. Al-Khoury, UPMC Passavant’s collaborative limb salvage team was able to save her leg. Its members – vascular surgeons, podiatrists, plastic reconstructive surgeons, and vascular medicine and infectious disease specialists – combined their skills to plan and coordinate her care. Specially trained wound care and cardiovascular



Janet on her utility terrain vehicle that she uses to get around her 20-acre farm.

lar nurses also played a vital role. “We worked very hard as a team to heal her leg,” says Dr. Al-Khoury. “Because of the complex nature of vascular disease and how sick patients like Janet are, you need multiple specialists working together to save limbs and lives. We rely on each other to develop a plan and achieve the best outcome.”

That multidisciplinary approach was comforting to Janet. “It wasn’t just one doctor looking at me, it was a team. That’s reassuring when you’ve got a team of specialists taking care of you, evaluating the situation, and deciding the best route to go,” she says. Janet’s surgery took place at UPMC Passavant–McCandless in a hybrid operating room (OR) dedicated for vascular procedures. The hybrid OR with its advanced medical imaging equipment can be used for both open surgeries and less invasive image-guided endovascular procedures. If needed, it allows specialists – often from several disciplines – to perform multiple procedures without having to move the patient.

Before coming to UPMC Passavant, Janet had several previous procedures on her foot and leg, including a bypass graft that rerouted blood around a clogged artery. But that vessel was now completely blocked. Dr. Al-Khoury performed an angiogram procedure to unclog the graft. He also rechanneled her arteries, using an angioplasty procedure to clean and improve the blood flow to her foot.

In the same OR, another team member from podiatry amputated her toe and removed dead tissue from the ankle wound to control the infection. Although three

Vascular disease involves the circulatory system outside of your heart. It’s often called a silent threat because it can strike without warning. Because blood vessels travel through the entire body, vascular disease can occur anywhere.

UPMC Passavant’s highly trained, board-certified vascular surgeons provide comprehensive and personally tailored care for patients with a wide range of conditions. They work closely with specialists in cardiology, podiatry, plastic surgery, infectious diseases, and wound care to ensure patients get the care they need.

Vascular disease includes any medical condition that affects the circulatory system, such as diseases of the arteries, veins, and lymph vessels like:

- Aortic aneurysm
- Carotid artery disease
- Deep vein thrombosis
- Diabetic foot care
- Peripheral artery disease
- Varicose veins

more toes eventually needed to be amputated, her foot, right leg, and big toe were saved after multiple procedures, including a skin graft to close the wound on her ankle. The limb salvage team followed her closely throughout her hospital stay and after discharge.

Recovery after Surgery

Janet calls Dr. Al-Khoury “a genius.” Everything has healed nicely, and she’s being fitted for a special shoe. She hopes to be riding her two horses again soon – a big goal of hers.

“It’s a miracle I still have my leg, ankle, heel, and a healthy big toe,” she adds. “That team is a godsend. I don’t have to travel across the country to find the best doctors. I just have to go to UPMC Passavant.”

“I think they’re the best and I think Dr. Al-Khoury is wonderful.”

Dr. Al-Khoury also sees patients at locations in McCandless, Sewickley, and New Castle. To schedule an appointment, call 412-748-6484. ■

UPMC Passavant Vein Center

Offering cosmetic and medical services for varicose veins and other vein disorders

Bulging varicose veins aren’t pretty. And in some cases, they can cause burning, itching, cramping, swelling, and other bothersome symptoms.

The UPMC Vein Center at UPMC Passavant offers the latest technology and treatments for unsightly and painful varicose veins. In addition to elective cosmetic treatments for spider veins and mild varicose veins, the Center also treats vein disorders, including leg ulcers, swollen legs, and deep vein thrombosis.

Age, weight gain, pregnancies, long periods of standing, and family history are factors that contribute to varicose veins.

Schedule an appointment at 412-802-3333.