



*“I give a lot of credit for my survival to my fitness routine.”*

## Profile: Kathy Martz

As Kathy Martz celebrated her 82nd birthday with family and friends on an August evening in 2006, there was no indication that a health crisis was looming. When she went to bed that evening, everything seemed fine, however, she awoke in the middle of the night with excruciating chest pain. “The pain shot up through my ears, and it felt like something had broken loose in my chest,” she says. “I was very sick after that.”

Ten days later, Kathy learned that she had suffered a rupturing aortic aneurysm — a weakened and bulging area in the aorta. In Kathy’s case, the aneurysm occurred in the main artery that carries blood from the heart to the rest of the body.

A “popping” that Kathy had felt when she awakened in the night was the aneurysm rupturing. Now the valve between Kathy’s heart and the aorta could not close properly and her blood flow was obstructed. “It was a very serious condition — one that I understand 90 percent of us would not survive,” says the grandmother of two from Steelton, Pa., outside of Harrisburg.

### Emergency Heart Surgery Required

Kathy’s only hope for survival was major emergency heart surgery to repair the ruptured artery. “The doctor said he wouldn’t touch it,” recalls Kathy, a widow who’s worked for 26 years at the local farm market. “He said my age was against me.” After her daughter sought a second opinion, the petite, brown-eyed, brown-haired senior citizen was referred to a specialist at Hershey Medical Center.

“Dr. Pae at Hershey concluded he could help me,” says Kathy. “He felt I was a good candidate for surgery based on my good health, my activity level and my positive outlook. He operated the next day.”

### “The Miracle Lady”

Sure enough, Kathy made it through the surgery and rehabilitation and returned home in October. Today, she’s living independently in the home that she and her husband built 50 years ago. She’s back to work, and she’s back to her exercise routine.

“After the surgery, another doctor in the hospital stopped by to say, ‘I want to touch the Miracle Lady,’ says Kathy, who also enjoys crocheting and gardening. “He sat with me and explained that my body was in good shape, and that’s why I survived the operation. He wanted to know my lifestyle, and I told him I still work, I drive, and I love my SilverSneakers fitness program offered by Highmark.”

Kathy, who works out at Gold’s Gym in Swatara Township, has participated in the program since 2005. “I give a lot of credit for my survival to my fitness routine,” she says. “From the moment I woke up after surgery, I wanted my friends from the gym to know that I was on my way back. All through the physical therapy, I told the therapist my ambition was to get back to the gym and to my job.”

*“... it brightened my future.”*

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## About Highmark's Medicare Advantage Fitness Benefit

The SilverSneakers Fitness program is a benefit of Kathy's Highmark Blue Shield health insurance, FreedomBlue<sup>SM</sup> PPO, a Medicare Advantage preferred provider organization (PPO) that offers many valuable services beyond those of traditional Medicare.

Highmark's Medicare Advantage and Medigap plans offer members the benefit of health club memberships at participating clubs as a means of preventive health care. Members can also attend fitness classes taught by certified instructors, receive wellness counseling and take advantage of social events.

## “Walking Miracle”

“I call Kathy our ‘Walking Miracle,’” marvels Jan Capan, Kathy's fitness instructor and adviser. Jan taught Kathy fitness classes for two years, three times weekly prior to the surgery and has shepherded her back to two classes weekly, with a third on the horizon.

“The program is so much bigger than fitness,” says Capan. “Yes, we are certified fitness experts well able to provide the strength training, stretching and cardio, but we also have special fitness for seniors called ‘activity for daily living.’ They focus on exercises to keep them fit for everyday activity, and we include social programming.”

“When I joined the fitness program, it brightened my future,” says Kathy. “It gave me something I really could look forward to. It changed my life.”

*Highmark Blue Shield is a health plan with a Medicare contract with the Federal government.*

