

# A matter of time

## Fredonia man able to share stroke survival story

By **DESIREE COON**  
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For local residents Francis and Shirley Wozniak, June 22 began as one of their worst days ever. It was about 7:30 a.m., and 86-year-old Francis "Frank" Wozniak was in the upstairs bathroom getting ready for the day, preparing to shave. Shirley, his wife of 63 years, was downstairs preparing breakfast when she heard Frank fall to the floor. As Shirley started upstairs, she heard her husband yelling to her, telling her to call 911.

Frank knew exactly what had happened. While he was still conscious and aware of what was going on around him, his left arm was numb, his voice was slurred, and he was unable to get up. He knew he had suffered a stroke.

Ischemic stroke is the most common type of stroke, accounting for about 88 percent of all strokes. In an ischemic stroke, a blood clot forms and blocks blood flow to a portion of the brain. Hemorrhagic stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain bursts, disrupting the brain's blood supply. As Mr. Wozniak would later find out, his was an embolic stroke caused by atrial fibrillation, or an irregular heart beat. This irregular heartbeat caused a small clot to form in his heart, which then traveled to his brain.

Stroke is often referred to as a "brain attack" to denote the fact that it is caused by a lack of blood supply to the brain, very much like a heart attack is caused by a lack of blood supply to the heart. Even a brief interruption in blood supply to the brain can cause problems. Brain cells begin to die after just a few minutes without blood or oxygen.

Starting emergency treatment immediately provides the best chance for recovery from a stroke. If the patient meets the guidelines, the treatment for ischemic stroke with "clot buster" medications like thrombolytic tissue type plasminogen activator (tPA) must be started within three hours to be effective.

Luckily for Frank, time was on his side. Shirley called 911 and emergency responders were at the Wozniak's Fredonia home within minutes. The responders immediately recognized the signs of stroke, began implementing the stroke protocol and prepared to transport Frank to Brooks Memorial Hospital in Dunkirk. The ambulance crew established communication with the emergency medicine physicians in the Brooks Emergency Department and an IV was started in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. Frank was conscious and alert the entire time, fully aware of the seriousness of his situation and what was going on around him. When he arrived at Brooks at 8:13 a.m., the emergency department staff was prepared for him and immediately took him to a treatment room. Frank received a STAT CT scan of his head within 15 minutes of arrival at Brooks.



Submitted photos

**Above: Frank and Shirley Wozniak in their Fredonia home. Below: The computer screen and remote camera on the REACH equipment.**

Prior to retiring in 1993, Frank had worked in medical sales. Medical technology and innovation had been an everyday part of his working life. Even in retirement he had kept up on current developments and advances in healthcare. He knew all about the importance of prompt treatment for stroke, and he also knew that Brooks had what he so desperately needed at that moment. As he was being told about the new REACH Telemedicine system at Brooks and receiving information about the risks and benefits of treatment with tPA, Frank made his wishes perfectly clear. He told his wife and the ED physicians, "I want that."

The recent REACH (Remote Evaluation of Acute Ischemic Stroke) initiative sponsored by New York state has provided Brooks with training, high-tech telemedicine equipment and access to stroke specialists. As a Rural Stroke Center, Brooks is able to provide "real-time" consultations and treatment recommendations from the neurologists and neurosurgeons at Millard Fillmore Gates Circle Hospital in

Buffalo.

Immediately after arriving in the Brooks Emergency Department, Frank was being treated by the staff there, as well as being remotely evaluated by the specialized physicians at Millard Fillmore Gates. The remote cameras and access to Brooks treatment data allowed the doctors in Buffalo to concur with the ED physician Dr. Michael Filice. Frank was indeed suffering from an ischemic stroke, and immediate administration of the clot buster tPA was in his best interests.

Within 120 minutes of recognizing the symptoms of stroke, Frank received the med-

ication that would make all of the difference in his life.

"After I got the medicine, the staff watched me intently, urging me to try and move my left hand. At first, I couldn't," Frank said, "but they kept saying 'try, try, try.' Within 10 minutes, I could move my fingers, then my hand, then my arm. It was amazing, and the doctor and nurses were applauding."

At 10:15 a.m., after his successful treatment in the emergency department, Frank was transported by helicopter to the Regional Stroke Center at Millard Fillmore Gates Hospital. He commented on this experience, saying that was when he knew he was going to be OK.

"I was waving goodbye to the staff, with my left hand, and they were all smiling and laughing because I looked so good. I spent five days at Millard and have made a full recovery from my stroke," he said. "Everything that could have gone right for me did, and I am so grateful to everyone at Brooks Memorial Hospital who cared for me."

Frank and Shirley have had a long relationship with Brooks Memorial Hospital. Both were born there, back when the old Brooks Mansion stood where the brick building is now. Frank's father, Adam, owned the Quality Bakery on Lake Shore Drive East in Dunkirk and supplied bread and baked goods to Brooks "back in the early days." Frank's father even served on the Brooks Memorial Hospital Board of Trustees many years ago.

"Brooks Memorial Hospital has always been important to us," Shirley said, "even before Frank had his stroke. Over the years, we have provided financial support for many of the hospital's building projects and we are proud to be founding members of the Horatio and Julia Brooks Society. I'm so glad that Brooks was here for us, with just what we needed, right when we needed it."

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