

A photograph of an elderly man, Richard Pender, sitting on a metal bench on a baseball field. He is wearing a light-colored jacket, a baseball cap, and glasses. He is smiling and gesturing with his hands. A baseball is visible in the air to the right. The background shows a baseball field with a fence and trees.

CARDIAC CARE

Pacemaker Gets Baseball Manager Back in the Game

*Richard Pender is looking forward
to an active baseball season.*

Shown: Richard Pender, 77, found the long-term solution to his heart arrhythmia and returned to managing youth baseball after being treated by cardiologists at Cardiovascular Interventionalists of Central Jersey and receiving a pacemaker at RWJ.

The 77-year-old former pitcher played on championship teams in junior high and high school and the American Legion, Union County and Elizabeth City leagues. The North Brunswick resident no longer plays baseball, but is a manager for the American Legion Middlesex County team for boys 19 and under. He also enjoys watching his grandson—one of 16 grandchildren—play high school baseball. “It’s all about quality of life, being able to do the things you like to do,” said Mr. Pender.

A few months earlier, Mr. Pender would not have been able to do these things. After recovering from bronchitis (an inflammation of the lungs), he was still short of breath and dizzy. The reason turned out to be his heart.

Nearly 25 years ago, Mr. Pender had several transient ischemic attacks (TIAs) and was diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat (an arrhythmia) called atrial fibrillation. TIAs are like strokes but usually last a few minutes and leave no permanent brain damage. Atrial fibrillation causes the heart’s two upper chambers (the atria) to beat irregularly and out of coordination with the two lower chambers (the ventricles). This condition increases the risk of stroke and TIAs.

After a heart attack in 1998, Mr. Pender had angioplasty and stenting of his coronary artery. A tiny balloon was temporarily inserted into the blocked artery and blown up to open it, and a stent (a small wire mesh tube) was put in to help keep the artery open. “No innovation in cardiology has been

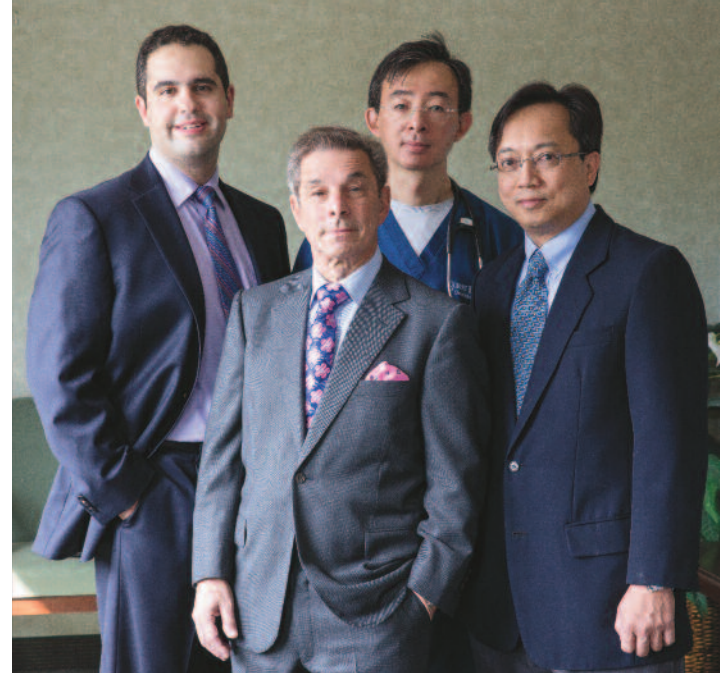
as far-reaching as angioplasty and stenting,” said George J. Saviano, MD, senior partner at Cardiovascular Interventionalists of Central Jersey in East Brunswick. Dr. Saviano has personally been in continuous practice for 30 years. Before starting Cardiovascular Interventionalists of Central Jersey, he was on the faculty at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, where he helped develop the angioplasty and stenting program at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJ)—one of the first in New Jersey—and put in the first stent. Dr. Saviano and colleagues Gary F. Avendano, MD, Joshua D. Balog, MD, and Lawrence Chai, MD, have been caring for Mr. Pender since 2005.

Tests done by Dr. Avendano in February 2013 showed that Mr. Pender’s heart was stopping—for up to three seconds at a time! He had developed a slow heart rate (bradycardia), along with atrial fibrillation. Dr. Avendano consulted with Dr. Balog and they met with Mr. Pender. They recommended a pacemaker, a small device placed under the skin near the heart, to keep his heartbeat from going too low, along with the medications he was already taking for the atrial fibrillation, which included a blood thinner to prevent stroke. “They talked to me as a person and let me be part of the discussions,” said Mr. Pender, who agreed with their recommendation. Helping patients understand their disease and treatment options is a key part of the patient-centered care at Cardiovascular Interventionalists of Central Jersey. “Medicine

should be individualized and patients should be active participants in their care,” said Dr. Avendano.

Since Mr. Pender had a high risk of stroke if the blood thinner he was taking was stopped before the procedure, as is usually done, Dr. Balog kept Mr. Pender on the medication and did the procedure at RWJ, one of the nation’s top hospitals for heart care. “We are used to doing procedures in patients on blood thinners there,” said Dr. Balog. “The staff there do many more complex procedures than other area hospitals.”

Mr. Pender is no longer short of breath or dizzy and his heart rhythm is normal. Along with managing baseball, he is back to writing (he has published a book about baseball in Union County and two historical novels) and is participating in antique racing car clubs.



Shown above: Led by Senior Partner George J. Saviano, MD (foreground), the team at Cardiovascular Interventionalists of Central Jersey managed Richard Pender’s condition and identified the right treatment option for his irregular heartbeat. Dr. Saviano’s colleagues are, from left: Joshua D. Balog, MD; Lawrence Chai, MD; and Gary F. Avendano, MD.

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