



Paul Bechtelheimer



Washington Township resident

Paul Bechtelheimer thought he had the flu. The tall, former Division I college athlete—like many men—avoided the doctor like the plague (no pun intended.) But after his symptoms persisted for more than a week in March 2014, he went to a local urgent care, where they immediately transferred him by ambulance to Kennedy—Washington Township’s ED.

Once at Kennedy, Bechtelheimer was put under the care of Dr. Neelesh Parikh, and RNs Diana Ohaus and Christina Goehringer, among many others who provided him care during his illness.

Parikh immediately realized the severity of his patient’s condition, which met the criteria of sepsis.

“When you see two words [describing a patient]: fever and confusion, there’s only a few things that go through your head as an emergency room physician. And you have to act on it very aggressively and very quickly, because time is very important at this stage,” Parikh says.

Bechtelheimer’s reluctance to seek treatment also played into the diagnosis. “When you have a patient that is reluctant to come, I know the severity of that illness is that much higher, and I know this guy is sick. So that staff moved on him very aggressively and very quickly,” Parikh says.

Doctors immediately began administering Bechtelheimer several liters of IVF and IV antibiotics. They also performed various tests to rule out other illnesses, such as meningitis. They ultimately arrived at a sepsis diagnosis.

“It’s a life-threatening condition related to an infection, whether it’s viral or bacterial,” Ohaus explains. “The infection is so severe, it causes total body failure. So your kidneys shut down, your liver shuts down, your brain starts to get less oxygen. ... You get blood clots; your fingertips get black; you lose circulation. ... Fifty percent of the people who come in with sepsis die. And of the 50 percent of people who live, in a year, 50 percent of those people die. That’s how severe it is.”

Bechtelheimer was transferred to the ICU, where he spent a week, requiring mechanical ventilation and blood pressure support. He doesn’t remember much about his stay, but learned of the severity of his illness after reading a journal kept by his wife, Chris.

“I didn’t know sepsis. I’m a dumb jock. I get cut, hurt, I just jump up and go after it,” he says. “But a couple weeks after my recovery, I had to go back to the kidney doctor, I had to go back to the urologist, I had to go to the heart doctor. And I’m saying to myself, ‘I must have been pretty [sick].’”

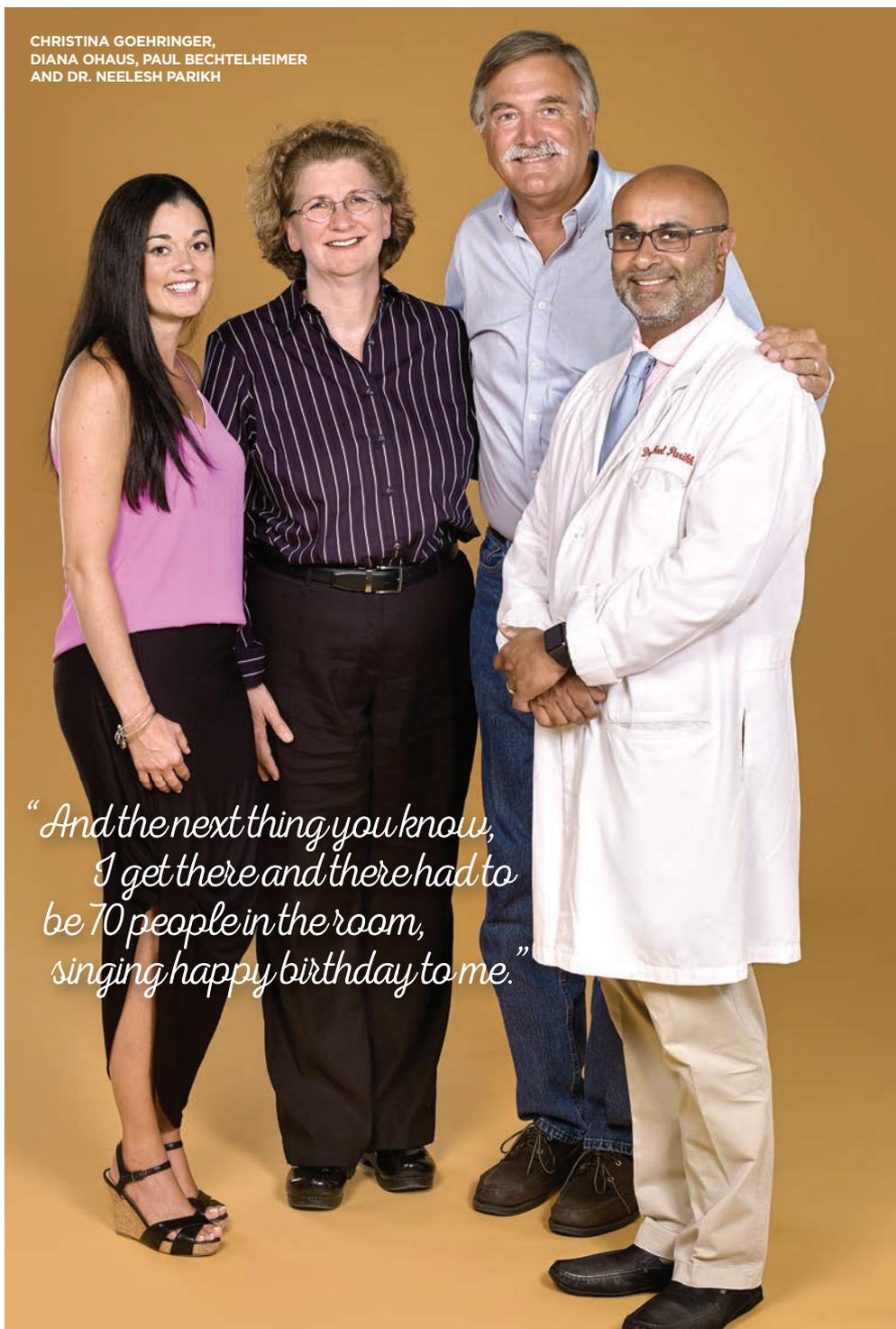
And while the source of infection was later determined—a kidney stone that Bechtelheimer didn’t even know he had—he still had some unfinished business at the hospital. He had spent his 60th birthday in the ICU, so for his 61st, Paul went back. He wanted

to thank his doctors and nurses—and celebrate that milestone birthday, albeit a year late.

So they set the party up, brought two sheet cakes, one for ICU and one for the ER doctors. “And the next thing you know, I get there and there had to be 70 people in the room, singing happy birthday to me,” he says.

And that thank you went a long way to his nurses and doctors. “One thank you makes me go for another 10 years,” Parikh says. “That’s all I need.”

CHRISTINA GOEHRINGER,
DIANA OHAUS, PAUL BECHTELHEIMER
AND DR. NEELESH PARIKH



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