


The Vigil

 St. Vincent's
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Sisters' Vigil

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Baseline CTs and best-in-the-country cardiologists: What Bill "Bubba" Bussey wants everyone to know



Bill "Bubba" Bussey with nurse Sandra Bradshaw

Bill "Bubba" Bussey, co-host of the *Rick and Bubba Show*, is intent on sharing what he learned from his June health crisis in hopes that others will seek heart and life-saving CT heart scans.

Bussey's cardiac story started when his routine primary care checkup with John Farley, MD at St. Vincent's One Nineteen included a calcium-scoring CT heart scan. Bussey believes that test and his resulting St. Vincent's East stent procedure may have saved his life.

"I didn't know I had a problem," says Bussey. "I didn't have any symptoms. All my tests were coming back fine. But then we did the CT heart scan and my calcium score came back high compared to my previous baseline scans. Dr. Farley referred me to a cardiologist. I already knew Dr. Robert Foster, a Birmingham Heart Clinic interventional cardiologist. He had been my mother's doctor. But I'll be

honest. When it comes to you and your heart, you want to ask around. In the situation I've been blessed with, I could have gone anywhere in the country."

"So, I talked with other doctors, people who sold heart stents, and people who had surgeries. Dr. Foster got glowing reviews across the board. The reputations of Dr. Foster and Birmingham Heart Clinic (BHC) are second to none. There was no need to go anywhere else when some of the best cardiologists in the country are right here in Birmingham."

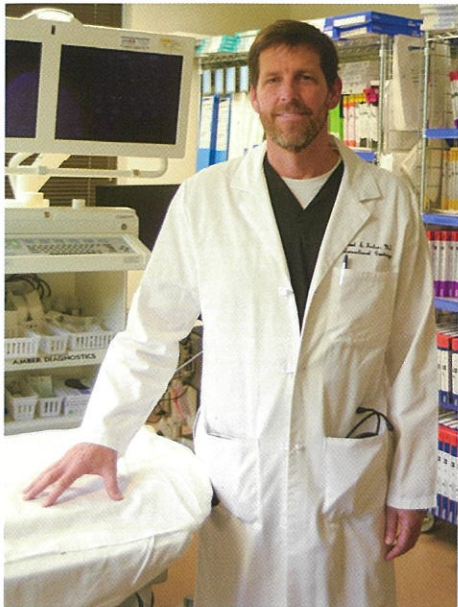
Robert Foster, MD says he and his BHC colleagues challenge each other to sharpen their skills in innovative ways, including working in multi-specialty teams. Such efforts have gained widespread national attention.

"Foundation donors should know about the advanced work we're doing at St. Vincent's, especially in leg artery and vein treatments as well as structural heart work by replacing heart valves through a catheter rather than open heart surgery," says Foster. "We're even on the cutting edge of aortic aneurysm repair and heart failure work that was formerly done only in university systems. Now physicians come to St. Vincent's East from all over the country to train in these advanced procedures."

One such procedure is a "radial" catheter insertion, providing heart access through a tiny wrist incision.

"We have the protocols at St. Vincent's East to do a very high radial volume," says Foster. "Even if you come in with a heart attack, your survival is better and your risk of complications much lower if we can go in through the wrist rather than the groin. While other medical centers typically do 30 percent of their procedures this way, we are able to perform 70 to 80 percent of ours radially."

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Dr. Robert Foster

Foster says Bussey was among the one-in-ten patients whose wrist structure prohibits such access. Even so, Bussey says he couldn't imagine a better experience.

"It's amazing to me that on a Friday morning Dr. Foster can go into the arteries of my heart and do a procedure to fix the place I had, and I can go home on

Saturday morning and go back to work on Monday morning. I would encourage everybody, but especially males—because we think we have to 'man up and tough out things'—to wise up and go get a CT scan if your primary physician calls for it. The scan takes less time than you'd spend in a drive-through. Get that baseline so you know what you're up against. I didn't have any pain, or any warning signs, but it turns out I had an artery that was 90 percent blocked. Eventually, I would have had some form of heart event."

That's why cardiologists urge patients to be proactive, says Foster. "We have good tools to treat disease, but that's not creating wellness. We want to get you in and treat you before you develop critical problems. That's where the CT calcium score comes in. It can tell us very early on that you are developing disease and we can begin to treat you in your 40's, rather than decades later, after you've had a heart attack."

Bussey says there's more he wants Foundation donors to know. "The spiritual part of my life plays an important role for me. Dr. Foster is not just a great doctor, but a person of faith and that means a great deal to me. I welcome a surgeon

who can say a prayer with me. That matters to me and my family, because that's real."

"From the St. Vincent's nurses to the operating team, I was just blown away by how nice they were," says Bussey. "I don't think you can fake that. It's not, 'Here's another patient, let's do the song and dance.' They legitimately care about what they're doing. I really do think that there are some jobs that have to be a calling. Those folks at St. Vincent's are under a calling. They're there because they love what they do, and they're designed to do that. And I sure am glad." ■

WHY HE GIVES

Dr. Robert Foster is a Saint Luke Society member, a physician who both practices at St. Vincent's Health System and financially supports the Foundation. He notes: "Because I really believe in healthcare as a ministry, and I don't think you get that in a lot of hospitals. Donating to a ministry is where my heart is. You can support businesses, but I don't look at Ascension or St. Vincent's as a business. I look at it as a ministry, and I look at what I can do to give back as a ministry. The Foundation is able to use my donation wherever it is needed. I have, obviously, been a big recipient for 22 years of that ministry, and it's important that I give back."

CARE CLOSE TO HOME

After seeing his last patient at St. Vincent's Blount one Wednesday evening, Dr. Robert Foster reflects on how cardiology patients are served throughout the entire St. Vincent's Health System:

"By working with St. Vincent's, our group is able to bring expertise to the entire region rather than staying in the mega centers. We can see patients in their communities, stage them there, and do their pre- and post-workups there. We concentrate all of our equipment at the larger hospitals where those patients may have to come every year or two, but it's important that we don't require people to always come to us—the 'experts.' It's hard for these patients to come downtown, to get a family member to take a day off work to bring them. So we bring that expertise to the community, so they can get the same high-quality care.

In other systems, they come once to the mega center, get 'fixed,' and don't come back until they're in bad shape again. Because we are able to go to them, we can keep them well. That is what's best for them."

Honorariums *The following individuals were recognized through a gift in their honor.*

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