

Billy, center, and his parents are all smiles after his successful surgery performed by Dr. Gaw.



FHCN PHOTO BY BRIAN GLENN

“Not Just for Older People.” Colon cancer can strike at any age. Find out how one family has dealt with the problem.

Billy Havens had a strong family history of early-onset colon cancer. “My dad had half his colon removed when he was twenty-nine, and I was only eighteen when I first had signs of a problem,” he recalls. “They found ten polyps, and eight of them were precancerous.”

Billy’s parents felt he was far too young at that point for major colon surgery, explains his mother, Sue.

“They wanted to remove the colon,” she explains, “but I said, *No, eighteen is too young for that kind of surgery.*”

Three years and several colonoscopies later, both Billy and his mother were referred to Janette U. Gaw, MD, a board-certified colorectal surgeon with The Colorectal Institute.

“I had a colonoscopy and they found a mass which had already gone into tissue,” says Sue. “Billy’s colonoscopies



The Colorectal Institute

VALERIE R. DYKE, MD
JANETTE U. GAW, MD
CESAR A. SANTIAGO, MD

showed more polyps every year, and the doctors said, *This is getting too dangerous. It’s not a question of if he gets cancer; it’s a question of when.*

“Dr. Gaw performed surgery on both my son and me on the same day in July 2007.”

Minimally invasive approach

Dr. Gaw and her colleagues, Valerie R. Dyke, MD, and Cesar A. Santiago, MD, are the only fellowship-trained colorectal surgeons operating in Lee County, and they treat a wide range of disorders, from colon cancer to hemorrhoids. They always use the latest technologies and a multidisciplinary approach to evaluate and treat their patients.

“When a problem is detected early,

most of the time we can do a minimally invasive procedure with a laparoscope,” explains Dr. Gaw. “Because the procedure is performed through smaller incisions than the traditional approach, patients have less pain, require less medication, get out of the hospital sooner, and return to normal activities sooner.

“Billy actually had the bigger of the surgeries,” she adds. “He had his entire colon out, but he was up and around in no time because I performed it laparoscopically.

“However,” she cautions, “anyone who is a candidate for this type of surgery needs a surgeon who is experienced and can make a judgment call as to whether or not the procedure can be done laparoscopically. Your surgeon should have performed the procedure on at least twenty cases before being considered proficient.”

“She’s the best”

Billy says he thinks his youth and the fact that his procedure was done laparoscopically were the main factors that made it so easy.

“I had my whole colon out, but I never had any pain, never even needed to take any pain medication,” he marvels. “I was a little sore, but that was it. I felt like I was in the best hands with Dr. Gaw, because she was recommended by all the doctors. She’s the best there is.”

His mother agrees.

“Dr. Gaw and her staff are awesome,” assures Sue. “They really were concerned and treated us very well. I recommend everyone I can to her.

“I want people to realize colon cancer is not just for older people,” she emphasizes. “It’s something even younger people need to have checked, particularly if they have a family history like we do.

“Testing saves lives.” **FHCN**



Valerie R. Dyke, MD, FACS, FASCRS, is board certified by the American Board of Surgery and the American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery. After receiving her medical degree from the University of Maryland, she completed her general surgical residency at Abington Memorial Hospital in Philadelphia. Dr. Dyke then completed a colorectal surgery fellowship at the Ferguson Colorectal Clinic in Michigan.



Janette U. Gaw, MD, FACS, FASCRS, is board certified by the American Board of Surgery and the American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery. After receiving her medical degree from Yale University, where she also completed her general surgery residency, Dr. Gaw was awarded a research fellowship with the Division of Colorectal Surgery at the Mayo Clinic. She then completed a colorectal surgery fellowship at the Georgia Colon and Rectal Surgery Clinic in Atlanta.



Cesar A. Santiago, MD, is board certified by the American Board of Surgery. After receiving his medical degree from Ponce School of Medicine, Dr. Santiago completed his general surgery residency at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine/Cabrini. He then completed a colorectal surgery fellowship at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital.

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