

# HealthWatch

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## Orthopedic Joint Center

Knee replacement recovery times  
now faster than ever.

by **KenMcEntee**  
Contributing Writer

**C**an a lady who received two new knees in the last six months really be ready to navigate Las Vegas?

You bet.

“They had me standing up and walking the same night that I had my surgery,” recalls Ann Vanek, who had double knee replacements done at *Southwest General’s Orthopedic Joint Center (OJC)* on Dec. 30, 2008 and Mar. 3, 2009. By the beginning of July, Ann was ready to hit the casinos.

Having been a physical therapist for 33 years, Ann was amazed when Mark Panigutti, MD, orthopedic surgeon, told her she would be home just days after having her knees replaced.

“Judging from the patients I was used to working with, I was expecting a longer hospital stay and a lot of pain,” she says. “I really didn’t have much pain at all compared to what I had expected.”



George and Carrie Nicklos.

Just two months after her second knee replacement, Ann was back to work assisting rehab patients at the Villa Camillus Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

“I wouldn’t be back to work so fast if the program didn’t work so well,” she insists. “Being a therapist I have to be able to plant myself firmly and have good balance while working with my patients.”

Ann had visited Dr. Panigutti for a couple years as her knees grew progressively worse.

“My knees were terrible,” she recalls. “After working eight hours, I couldn’t do anything else the rest of the day. I had to do something. Dr. Panigutti told me about the new OJC program at Southwest General and thought I would be a good candidate for it. It really gave me back my quality of life.”

The OJC opened in November 2008.

George Nicklos, whose knees wore down after years of working in construction, was the first patient to have a knee replacement done at the OJC.

“I said, ‘What am I, the guinea pig?’ But they put me in a comfort zone and gave me outstanding care,” George recalls. “Right from the beginning I was impressed with the doctors, nurses, administrators and everybody there.”

George says the experience was totally different from when he had his first replacement done three years earlier at another facility. That time he was hospitalized for 10 days.

Carrie Nicklos was shocked when Joseph Scarcella, MD, orthopedic surgeon, said her husband would be home three days after his partial knee replacement.

“I panicked because our house is full of stairs,” she recalls. “I said ‘this is impossible.’ If he fell, I wouldn’t be able to pick him up.”

But, as promised, George was back home in his Middleburg Heights split level three days after surgery and able to manage just fine on his own.



Physical Therapist Ann Vanek (right) is back to work after having both knees replaced.

The care at the OJC was so good that George wasn’t sure he wanted to leave.

“I never thought I would say this, but I kind of enjoyed staying in the hospital,” he says. “I was getting such great treatment and really enjoyed socializing with everybody.”

The day after having his right knee replaced, George walked three times to the Center’s dining room and back for his meals. Just a few months later he was in Arizona playing golf.

“When I had my left knee replaced three years ago, I just laid in bed for the first day,” he says. “At Southwest the therapy they gave me right away was unbelievable. There was no comparison in the two programs I went through.”

Along with four weeks of physical therapy at LifeWorks of Southwest General, George was given a regimen of exercises to do conveniently at home.

Displaying a photo of him and the two other patients who made up the OJC’s “first graduating class,” George says he fully recommends the program.

“I am a believer,” he says.

Ann agrees.

“Six months ago I could hardly walk,” she says. “Now I’m going to Vegas, baby!”

Odds are the OJC of Southwest General can return your quality of life as well.

*To find out more about the Orthopedic Joint Center at Southwest General, call Health Connection at 440-816-5050. The Center is located in the hospital at 18697 Bagley Road, Middleburg Heights.*

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