

OPMC's new heart program saves life of Argyle man The program installed a pacemaker, balloon pump and stent.

MARY MARAGHY

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Gerry Castillo, a 54-year-old Argyle man, would be dead today if it weren't for a heart attack intervention program implemented at Orange Park Medical Center three days before Castillo arrived at the emergency room with chest pains.

"I had somebody watching out for me," said Castillo, whose heart stopped beating 30 minutes after he arrived at the ER on Oct. 16. Doctors spent more than 2 hours shocking his chest more than 25 times with a defibrillator.

Castillo's wife, Reyna, knelt praying at his bedside while Castillo's 25-year-old son, Eric, watched and tried to prepare himself for the untimely demise of his energetic, always-on-the-go father.

When doctors finally got Castillo's heart beating, ever-so-slightly, they raced him to the hospital's newly improved cardiac catheterization lab where cardiac doctor Youssef Al-Saghir used a catheter to install a pacemaker, a balloon pump and a stainless steel stent to open a clogged artery in Castillo's heart. Minutes later, Castillo's heart was fine.

"This man literally died in the ER and he was on life support," said Gerry Chagnon, cardiopulmonary director. "For this to be our first case was amazing."

Most Jacksonville **hospitals** already use the catheter intervention, but Orange Park was not approved for it because the **hospital** doesn't have a heart surgery unit, which the state requires.

In the past, patients undergoing heart attacks had to be transported by ambulance or taken by helicopter - usually a 47-minute ride - to Memorial **Hospital** in Jacksonville.

"It was really inconvenient for everybody. This is time sensitive," said Paul Trenteseaux, a registered cardiac invasive specialist formerly of Memorial who helped start Orange Park's program. "Time is muscle. You better hustle. Dead meat don't beat."

Orange Park **hospital** officials a year ago submitted a 3,000-page application to the state requesting a waiver that would allow a doctor to unclog heart arteries on site. The **hospital** also spent nearly \$800,000 on the required equipment, training and staff. The waiver was granted Oct. 13.

The waiver means the **hospital** can perform primary percutaneous intervention on patients with acute myocardial infarction, said Al-Saghir of First Coast Cardiovascular Institute. In other words, doctors can now abort a heart attack by opening a clogged artery in the heart. Every minute that the heart muscle is deprived of blood, it translates into shortening of that patient's life.

Had Castillo arrived before Oct. 13, he wouldn't have made it.

"It's really remarkable. There's no way he'd have lived. ...," said Al-Saghir.