

After a life-saving liver transplant, **Tom Awad** was ready to

PLAY BALL!

BY ALEXANDER ZELENYJ

Life or death experiences are often the catalyst that bring about great change in a person's life. People come out of close brushes with death with a new perspective, and have new goals and priorities in their lives.

This was certainly the case for Tom Awad, who successfully underwent an 11-hour liver transplant operation on November 16, 2002. "I had my liver transplant when an unknown virus attacked my liver," Tom explains. "This caused liver failure and a 90-day stay in London at LHSC University Hospital where Dr. William Wall performed the transplant that saved my life."

Tom, now 72, knows he was very fortunate to have received the lifesaving transplant at the age of 60. "I was lucky that a matching liver was found, as the nurses told my wife that I had about a week to live after a month-long stay waiting in the hospital."

Tom says that normally an organ recipient's stay in the hospital is a week to 10 days following a transplant, but that due to infections and the failure of his kidneys to respond after the operation, he was forced to remain in the hospital for over 60 days.

"Fortunately they got my infections under control, and my kidneys started to function normally again, and my new liver has been working at a young man's pace ever since."

The first thing Tom was inspired to do when he woke up following the surgery was to put his experience on paper. He did so in the form of a long poem, entitled "At the Edge". The poem is an emotionally charged way of saying thank you to the donor of his new liver.

"As recipients of an organ transplant will tell you," Tom says, "There is great happiness and gratitude after your life is saved and the knowledge that you can live a normal life again."

Tom stresses the bittersweet nature of knowing the sacrifice that was made to help him live a normal and happy life.

"It's tempered by the fact that another person died and their family is in the midst of great suffering and sadness, and made a compassionate decision to donate their loved one's organs. I will always remember and be thankful of that heroic decision by my donor family."

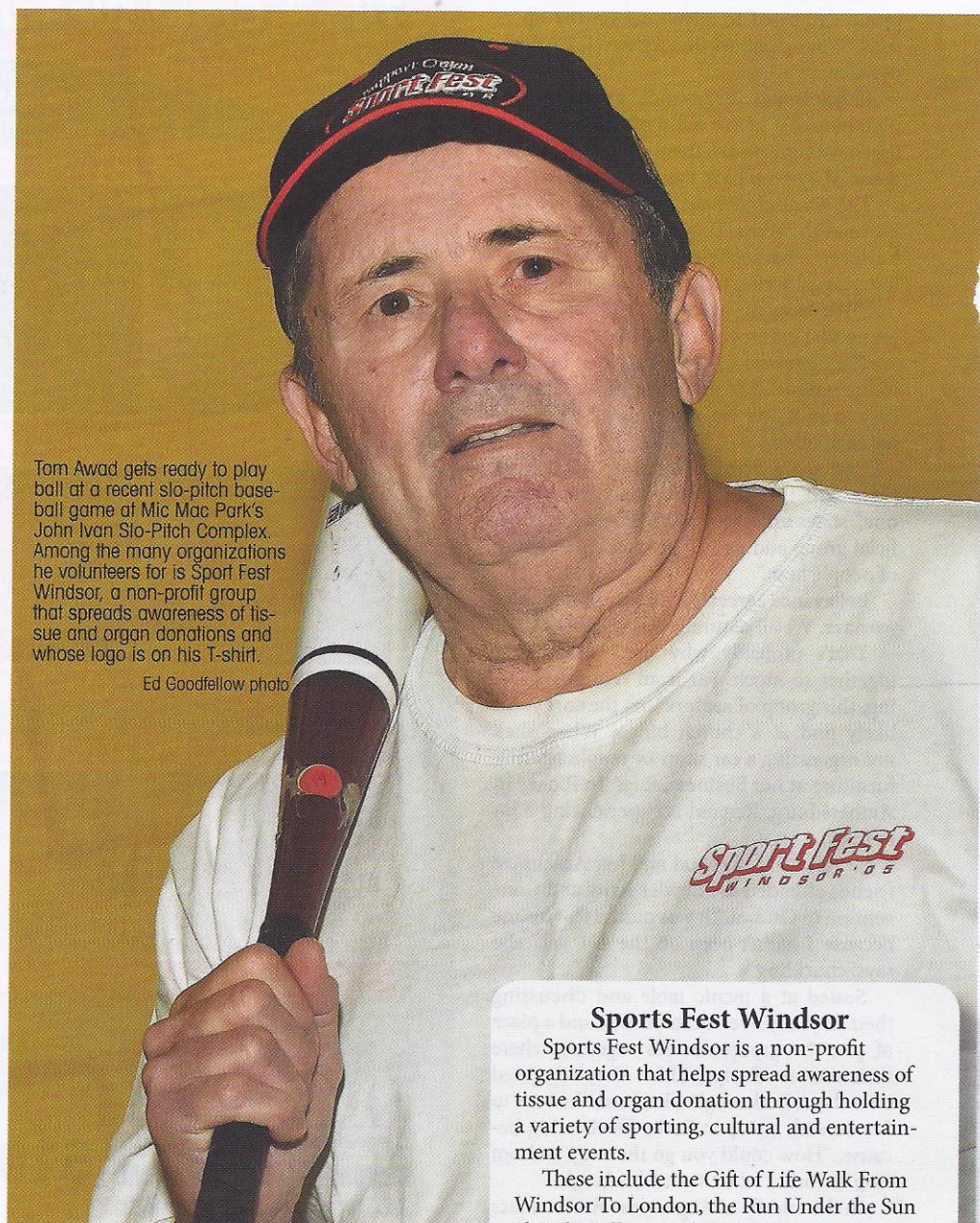
Tom Awad gets ready to play ball at a recent slo-pitch baseball game at Mic Mac Park's John Ivan Slo-Pitch Complex. Among the many organizations he volunteers for is Sport Fest Windsor, a non-profit group that spreads awareness of tissue and organ donations and whose logo is on his T-shirt.

Ed Goodfellow photo

Tom's frightening experience brought about a new way of looking at life. He knew that he'd been given a second chance, and in his gratitude he felt a strong desire to give something back to the world, as seen in a line from his poem: "I want to go back, and do more good."

The best way Tom could think of to do this was to volunteer his time, energy, and passion to a wide number of helping organizations throughout Windsor. These include the St. Vincent de Paul Society's Church Youth Group, where Tom works with both parish priests and parents to plan events with groups from other parishes, and Goodfellows, for whom he helps distribute the organization's newspaper.

Although it was difficult to choose from the many organizations he volunteers with, when asked which of them were closest to his heart, Tom had three in mind.



Sports Fest Windsor

Sports Fest Windsor is a non-profit organization that helps spread awareness of tissue and organ donation through holding a variety of sporting, cultural and entertainment events.

These include the Gift of Life Walk From Windsor To London, the Run Under the Sun 5k/10k Walk/Run, the High School Girls Slo-Pitch Tournament, the Souper Bowl Volleyball Tournament, a co/ed floor hockey tournament, two golf tournaments, the Teeth Whitening Program with help from local dentists, an organ donor family tribute dinner, and the Butler/Palmer Christmas Wish Concert.

Tom's brother, Roger Awad, is the Co-Chair of Sports Fest Windsor, and admires his sibling's perseverance through difficult times. "Sport Fest Windsor would not have existed if it weren't for Tom's vision and desire to help others," he says with pride.



Roger Awad

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“As the president and co-chair, he has guided all of us for the last 12 years in organizing events, creating promotional materials, soliciting sponsors and encouraging other organ recipients and donor families to participate in our efforts to promote organ and tissue donation awareness.”

With events running throughout the year, Sports Fest will continue to spread word about how people can become involved as donors.

Trillium Gift of Life Network

The Trillium Gift of Life Network (TGLN) is a not-for-profit agency of the Government of Ontario. TGLN plans, promotes, coordinates and supports organ and tissue donation and transplantation across Ontario. Its mission is to save and enhance lives through the gift of organ and tissue donation and transplant surgery in Ontario.



Paula Schmidt

Paula Schmidt is Windsor and Essex County's Regional Hospital development coordinator for the Trillium Gift of Life Network. She has worked with Tom for many years, and vouches for his important role in the

community.

“As an avid volunteer with Trillium Gift of Life Network, Tom Awad has worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the importance of organ and tissue donation in Windsor and Essex County,” she says. “From registration drives, to baseball tournaments, to tribute dinners, Tom has truly turned his gratitude for his second chance at life into action.”

Schmidt says that Tom's efforts have helped to inspire others in the community. “Trillium Gift of Life Network thanks him for all of his efforts, and for inspiring Windsor and Essex County to register their consent for organ donation.”

Autism Services Inc.

Another organization that's benefited from Tom's involvement is Autism Services Inc. The organization's mission is to identify and assure the delivery of quality supports while advocating for people with Autism disorders, and to help them to reach their maximum potential in the community.



Bruce Awad

Tom's brother, Bruce Awad, was the former president of Autism Services Inc., and admires his brother's dedication to the organization. “Tom started off as a board member and then moved on to become first vice president and then president.”

He maintains that Tom's most significant contribution was as chair of the fundraising committee. “Over time his tireless fundraising efforts raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for ASI. Everything from bingos to cheese sales to golf tournaments to pasta dinners, you name it, he got it done.” Bruce stresses that Tom's efforts largely enabled ASI to run its programs and be-

come a major service provider for people with Autism.

Tom was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2009, but the diagnosis hasn't changed his new outlook at all. He continues to be a great role model to anyone considering joining up with a helping organization in the city, volunteering his services with just as much energy

and enthusiasm as ever.

More than anything, Tom remains a dedicated spokesperson for the noble cause of organ donation. He's been true to the promise he made in the poem he wrote following his transplant surgery: Tom did come back from that life-threatening experience, and has been doing good helping others ever since.