

# Family Physician Gets to the Heart of the Matter

*This is the first in a series of physician profiles. If you have an interesting patient story, are offering innovative services or treatment modalities in your practice or know a fellow physician who should be featured, please provide your ideas to Claudine Leone at [claudine@njafp.org](mailto:claudine@njafp.org).*

**W**hen a patient is happy with a family physician, it is typically because of a good bedside manner, a caring and compassionate nature and the feeling that the patient's concerns being heard.

Liz Thomas, 55, has been a patient of Stephen Land, MD, a family physician with Virtua Mount Laurel Family Physicians for more than 20 years for these very reasons. But 12 years ago, it wasn't Dr. Land's usual interest in what Liz had to say, but more importantly what he heard through his stethoscope, that ultimately saved Liz's life.

"I was scheduled for a routine visit and a review of my blood work. Things were heading on the right path until Dr. Land listened to my heartbeat and heard something different. Those four words, 'I hear something different,' led me on a long path of discovery that ultimately turned out to be an aortic aneurysm," says Liz.

In June of 2013, Liz had successful open heart surgery to repair the aneurysm, which if left undiagnosed and untreated, could have resulted in a rupture. Today, Liz has been given a clean bill of health and is living life to the fullest, thanks to that not-so-routine visit to Dr. Land's office.

But despite the credit Liz, her parents and daughter – all patients of Dr. Land – give the family physician, he remains humble about the role he played.

"I never call this a job; it is just what I do," he says.

The Vincentown resident found his calling in family medicine naturally. He started his medical career as an EMT with the Hampton Lakes Emergency Squad in Southampton, NJ.

When he decided to pursue a medical degree at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, he wasn't sure if he wanted to specialize in emergency medicine and trauma or cardiology. But during a break from medical school, Dr. Land had an opportunity to work alongside Bob Irvin, MD, a physician from Manahawkin who led a family medicine practice. He was so impressed at how well Dr. Irvin knew his patients and their families that he decided to pursue family medicine himself. Dr. Land says after that experience with Dr. Irvin, family medicine "just felt right."

Dr. Land went on to graduate from Rutgers Medical School in Camden with his medical degree and complete a residency in family medicine, with added qualifications in geriatric medicine, at Virtua Mt. Holly, formerly Memorial Hospital of Burlington County. Today,



Stephen Land, MD (l) with his patient, Liz Thomas (r).

he is a diplomat of and is certified by the American Board of Family Medicine, and he is a Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians.

"I love family medicine because my day is full of unusual and diverse situations – routine visits, simple illnesses and life-changing circumstances," says Dr. Land. "I know I'm seeing patients during what may be vulnerable and stressful moments in their lives. My goal in interacting with patients is to listen to them, give them a clear path to follow, and some words of encouragement along the way."

"People want a doctor they know they can trust to do what's in their best interest," says Dr. Land. "They want someone they're confident in, and it's my aim to be that kind of physician." ▲



**Physician Profile** will be a new and recurring View in *Perspectives*. If you know a family physician who has an interesting story to tell, please contact Claudine Leone at: [claudine@njafp.org](mailto:claudine@njafp.org) or by calling (609) 394-1711.