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Alfred Trang

# A MAJOR STEP FORWARD

With help from **Dr. Alfred C. Trang** and the bariatric program at **St. Mary Medical Center**, patients gain control over their weight and improve their overall health.

by **MATT COSENTINO**

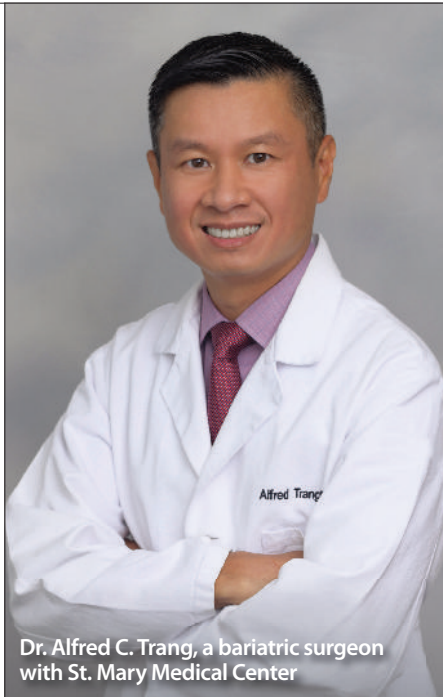
Like many patients of Alfred C. Trang, M.D., Jay and Melony Singer had tried everything to keep their weight under control over the years. From fad diets and weight-loss programs to gym memberships and regular exercise, the married couple would experience varying levels of success, but ultimately find themselves back at square one.

Entering their 50s, they realized it was time to get a firm grasp on their health, especially with a son on the autism spectrum who they want to be able to support for years to come. So, in early 2022, they made the decision to undergo bariatric surgery under the care of Dr. Trang at St. Mary Medical Center just two months apart.

Now, over a year later, both have reached their weight-loss goals, have improved self-esteem, and achieve better overall health. The process has been transformative to say the least, a point that was made clear to Jay when he recently ran into an old friend he hadn't seen in two years and the man had no idea who he was.

"That happens all the time, where people don't even recognize me," says Jay, who has lost 100 pounds since the surgery. "They say, 'Oh my God, you look amazing.' ... I took one of those pictures with my old pants, and I can literally fit in one of the legs. It's been a huge game-changer for the both of us."

"It's also the health aspect that is huge," Melony adds. "I'm not out of breath after walking up steps anymore and I can do a lot more activities, and my confidence is much better. Fortunately, I didn't have any medical issues before, like high blood pressure or pre-diabetes. But in order to not



Dr. Alfred C. Trang, a bariatric surgeon with St. Mary Medical Center

have them, this is what I needed to do."

Dr. Trang, who has been performing bariatric surgery for 15 years, was recruited by St. Mary Medical Center to establish the consistent program that was missing from the hospital. In less than three years, he has overseen a team that is now a member of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery. Furthermore, St. Mary Medical Center was recently certified as a Bariatric Center of Excellence.

Dr. Trang first got interested in this type of medicine during surgical residency, attracted to the precise nature of the oper-

ation and the lasting impact it can have on the entire body.

"You're helping not just one organ but many aspects of the patient's health," Dr. Trang says. "You're also helping with mental health and the overall well-being of a patient. To do surgery that has that big of an impact on a patient's health and life is incredibly rewarding."

The two main surgeries that Dr. Trang performs are a sleeve gastrectomy, which both of the Singers opted for, and gastric bypass. The former is the most popular and involves removal of 70 percent of the stomach and forming the remainder into a narrow tube the shape of a banana. As a result, patients get full much quicker and therefore do not eat as much. The gastric bypass, which has been around since the 1960s, is better for patients with significant heartburn or reflux, diabetes, or uncontrolled hypertension.

Candidates for either surgery are patients with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher, or a BMI of 35 to 40 with comorbidities related to their weight.

"I think one of the misconceptions is that bariatric surgery is the easy way out," Dr. Trang says. "That is definitely not the case. It's a pretty strong commitment to a whole lifestyle change for the rest of your life. The surgery is just a tool, a very effective tool, to be used in conjunction with diet and exercise to help you achieve the weight loss you want."

The Singers can attest to the fact that the process was not an easy one, but they are thrilled with the results and the compassion that Dr. Trang has shown them. He, in turn, has been inspired by their progress.

"We are proud to follow them for life to address any issues they have," he says. "And it's nice for me because I get to hear about how their lives have changed. ... Patients often tell me, 'My only regret is I wish I had done this five or 10 years ago.' That resonates with me, and that's why I want to let other patients know who might be on the fence to help them make that decision." ■



**St. Mary Surgical Associates Langhorne**

**1203 Langhorne-Newtown Road  
St. Clare Medical Bldg., Suite 225  
Langhorne, PA 19047**

**(215) 710-6613**

**www.trinityhealthma.org**