

# HeartHealth

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2026 • 1C



## Life is good

Cardiac survivor shares heart failure ordeal

Feb. 20, 2024, Judy Lane walked into LaFollette Medical Center for her shift knowing something felt off.

"I'd been sick for a few days — shortness of breath, just not feeling right — but I didn't connect it to my heart," she said.

A nurse at the hospital, she headed to the emergency room and asked them to "check me out."

What happened next unfolded faster than she could process.

"It all went downhill from there," Lane said with a small laugh. "It was chaotic."

She was admitted to the intensive care unit, where an echocardiogram revealed the truth she never expected: she was in heart failure.

Six days later, Feb. 26, "I just crashed."

"Technically, I died on Feb. 26," she said. "I coded on the cath lab table and never recovered that weekend. From what I read in my medical records, I gave them a run for their money."

Because of the severity of her condition, within 24 hours Lane was transferred out of LaFollette to Turkey Creek Medical Center.

There, Lane "underwent an electrical cardioversion procedure to convert her heart rhythm back to normal," said Shannon Smith, marketing communications director for American Heart Association in Knoxville. "While there she also suffered cardiac arrest and required multiple shocks to come back to life."

"After a few days she was

transferred to Nashville because they thought she might require a heart transplant, but ended up not needing one," Smith said of Lane.

Lane spent a week at TCMC before she was flown to Ascension St. Thomas Hospital Midtown in Nashville, where she was placed on a transplant list, the next step if her heart didn't "do a turnaround."

That's where she regained consciousness.

Through it all, "it was very scary, but I felt at peace. Everything was out of my control," Lane shared. "My nurse brain was working, but I couldn't get anything to make sense."

Her medical team used every tool available to keep her alive.

"I was on multiple implanted devices," Lane said. "I had an Impella close to my heart, I was on ECMO, and I had a

**Photos submitted**  
Top: Judy Lane (center) shares a quality family moment in 2025 with son, Rylen Lane, 16, and daughter Reighlen Lane, 15, following her heart crisis the year before.

**Above:** Judy Lane could still smile while she was in intensive care with heart failure. Once diagnosed in a LaFollette hospital, she was transported to Turkey Creek Medical Center, where she spent a week before being transported again to a hospital in Nashville.

pacemaker."

The Impella acted as a tiny internal heart pump while the ECMO served as life support

for both her heart and lungs.

Lane believed the combination

**See HEART FAILURE on Page 5C**

## New options available for statin-intolerant patients

With the U.S. Centers for Disease Control reporting nearly 25 million adults in the country have total cholesterol levels higher than 240 mg/dL, demonstrating a need for cholesterol management medication, a new survey is bringing light that 61 percent of respondents are not aware of alternatives outside of statins to lower cholesterol.

With heart disease remaining the leading cause of death in the U.S., cardiologist Dr. Laxmi Mehta is focused on educating Americans about al-

ternative options for managing cholesterol.

In addition to statins, there are newer, non-statin medications available in both oral and injectable forms for individuals who are statin-intolerant or who need an additional line of defense.

Currently, statins are one of the top medications prescribed.

"Statins are prescriptions medications that are used to lower LDL or the 'bad' cholesterol," explained Mehta, director of preventative cardiology

and women's cardiovascular health at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

The statins, "also impact the development or progression of atherosclerosis – buildup of fats and cholesterol in the arteries," Mehta said. "Since statins have a secondary benefit, we consider them the gold standard."

"Statins are typically prescribed for patients who are at high risk for cardiovascular disease, have diabetes or have an LDL level greater than 190," she said. "Statins often get a bad reputation because they may have side effects in some patients, but the evidence consistently shows they are highly effective and remain the cornerstone of cholesterol treatment and lowering heart dis-

ease risk."

For people having difficulties with statins, the cardiologist said non-statin medications are an option for those who are statin-intolerant and require LDL lowering or need additional help in lowering their LDL to meet goal levels.

"These medications can be used in combination with statins for optimal cholesterol management," she said. "There are several types of non-statin medications:

**See STATIN on Page 4C**

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# Close to the heart

## How Callie Hodge gives back at ETCH

When Callie Hodge steps out of the development office at East Tennessee Children's Hospital, she does not need to walk far to find a sense of motivation.

Rather, the 27-year-old Hodge merely needs to leave the building and step across Clinch Avenue to the South Tower.

There, on the second floor, is the cardiology unit, and a reminder that Hodge's life was altered, forever fueling the work she does today.

### From 'earth-shattering' to life-saving

Shortly before Hodge's 3rd birthday, her mom took her to the doctor in Nashville, where they lived at the time.

"I had respiratory infections and was sick a lot," Hodge explained. "I was 2 years old, in and out of the doctor. My mom took me to a pediatrician, and they listened to my heart and heard a murmur."

Doctors asked Hodge's mother if she was aware of the murmur, and she said no.

Immediately, Hodge was scheduled for a cardiology appointment that same day.

"My mom knew that something wasn't right," Hodge said, "so she called my dad and he met her there."

Upon further investigation, the cardiologist diagnosed Hodge with an Atrial Septal Defect (ASD), a congenital heart defect in which there is a hole between the upper heart chambers, according to the Mayo Clinic. The hole increases the amount of blood going through the lungs, and

it can cause serious damage if left untreated.

Doctors also discovered she had Partial Anomalous Pulmonary Venous Return (PAPVR), a condition causing abnormal blood flow from her lungs to her heart, per the Cleveland Clinic. One or more pulmonary veins were returning oxygen-rich blood to the wrong side of Hodge's heart.

Together, these two issues explained her respiratory infections. But they also spoke to a much deeper issue — that, without open-heart surgery, her life expectancy would be just 19 years old.

"It was earth-shattering for my parents because I'm the oldest child, so that was probably the first time they had really experienced something being wrong with their child," Hodge said. "I can't imagine what that was like."

The surgery was scheduled, and less than a year later, the family moved back to the Knoxville area.

Soon after, Hodge began seeing Dr. Michael Liske, a cardiologist in the same unit that sits across from Hodge's office today.

He, along with other cardiologists, has cleared Hodge to lead a perfectly normal life.

But as Hodge grew older and became aware of her condition, that spurred something deeper, too.

"My parents were always very open, and I grew up knowing my heart was different and that I had surgery," she said.

**See HODGE on Page 4C**



Above photo by Jake Nichols/  
Left photo submitted



**Above:** Callie Hodge, a former cardiology patient at East Tennessee Children's Hospital, now works at the hospital as a major gifts officer.

**Left:** Callie Hodge, a major gifts officer at East Tennessee Children's Hospital, spends time with a patient. Hodge noted that she is quite fond of these experiences, as she gets a chance to experience the joy and resilience that these children exude.



# HEALTHY HEART CHALLENGE

**Come for your heart. Stay for your health.**

### Join the February Healthy Heart Challenge!

February is American Heart Month, and there's no better time to take steps toward a healthier heart! At the YMCA of East Tennessee, we're inviting you to join our Healthy Heart Challenge and make heart health a priority.

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# Stayin' Alive: the importance of CPR certification

If you are a fan of the American version of "The Office," then the hit song "Stayin' Alive" will always strike a chord.

Season 5 of this show presented the song as an example of the correct beat to follow — 100 to 120 beats per minute — when doing chest compressions for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, otherwise known as CPR.

The "Stayin' Alive" scene and its aftermath brought quite a few laughs, but the stark reality of this situation is hardly funny.

According to a 2025 piece from the American Heart Association, more than 350,000 cardiac arrests occur outside of hospitals in the United States annually.

Moreover, three out of four of those cardiac arrests happen in homes with these incidents proving fatal 90 percent of the time.

Cheryl Smith, CEO of CPR Choice in Knoxville, is quick to point out the benefits of proper CPR certification.

"It just takes a few hours to learn, and it's really impactful because it works," Smith said. "We just had a business tell us they saved a man's life by having these skills. So that's our goal, is for people to feel confident in these skills to be able to jump in as quickly as possible. Seconds truly matter, so we want to empower people for what to do in the case of emergency."

The impact is not just limited to adults either, as children ages 9 and older can take a CPR certification class.

"We hear those stories all the time about a kid that steps into action with a teacher or sibling or parent," Smith said. "I have three kids, and I'm glad all

three know how to do CPR."

She added that the age range exists because children have to possess the physical strength for compressions.

"So the older they get, the better they are," Smith said. "Really, what we focus on with kids is recognizing warning signs of heart attack and stroke. So if you see these warning signs — a parent with shortness of breath, chest pain, nausea — that might be an emergency."

"And it's the same with a stroke — someone who's having trouble speaking, paralysis to one side. Those kids can recognize that and call 9-1-1 as quickly as possible. Then if they can step in with those chest compressions, that's great."

Aside from individual classes, Smith noted that they do on-site business training and teach groups, such as Girl Scouts, homeschoilers and church groups.

The certification is only good for two years, so she recommended anyone who is not CPR-certified within that time frame should brush up to be safe.

Speaking of which, Smith noted a couple of changes in how to approach those who are suffering from a heart attack, stroke or may even be choking.

"One of the biggest changes that just happened recently in the last 60 days is that, for the longest time, we did CPR on infants using two fingers," she said. "They just switched it to using the palm of one hand. I've been teaching CPR for 25 years, and that's a really big change. Parents expecting new babies were always taught to do the two-finger compressions, and now they've switched it."



Adults practice chest compressions on CPR dummies at CPR Choice in west Knoxville on Saturday, Feb. 6, 2026.

As far as choking assistance, people previously went right to the Heimlich maneuver for adults and children. That involves performing abdominal thrusts from behind while squeezing the person who's choking above the belly button. Now, Smith noted that the first step is to deliver five hard back blows with the heel of one's hand in-between the person's shoulder blades, then go to the five abdominal thrusts before repeating the cycle.

"You repeat that until the object comes out or until the victim passes out, and that is when you do CPR,"

Smith said.

For an infant, the cycle involves five back blows then five chest thrusts with the heel of one's hand.

And if CPR is needed, then Smith confirmed that the song "The Office" scene remains prevalent today.

"The tempo of Stayin' Alive is 100 beats per minute, and that's the recommended number of compressions," she said. "Also, 'Rocky Top' is 120 beats per minute, so you wouldn't want to go any faster than the tempo of that."

~ Jake Nichols

## Statins

From page 1C

• Ezetimibe: An oral medication, which blocks cholesterol absorption at the intestinal level, reducing LDL cholesterol by 18 to 25 percent.

• PCSK9 Inhibitors: A highly potent injectable medication, administered every two to four weeks, that can lower LDL cholesterol by 45 to 64 percent.

• Inclisiran: An injectable medication, administered twice a year after the initial doses, that can reduce LDL cholesterol by about 50 percent.

• Bempedoic Acid: An oral medication, particularly for people who are intolerant to statins, used to help lower LDL cholesterol by 21 to 24 percent.

The recent survey "found 61 percent of Americans haven't heard of non-statin medications," Mehta said. "A

reason for this could be that many of the medications are newer and we're just now starting to have more data on their cardiovascular benefits. There's also a lack of desire to be on additional medications, a gap in knowledge in the healthcare system and cost is also a real barrier," she said. "The reality is that statins are still the first line of therapy because of their effectiveness, but we have other options in our tool box for

those who are intolerant to statins or unable to achieve adequate LDL levels with only a statin."

When paired with a heart-healthy diet and regular exercise, these options (Ezetimibe, PCSK9 inhibitors, Bempedoic Acid) may help support cholesterol management and reduce the risk of related complications, including heart attack and stroke

~ Tammy Cheek

## Hodge

From page 2C

Over time, that understanding inspired Hodge to support nonprofits as a high school student. She continued to give back in college, hosting fundraisers for East Tennessee Children's Hospital.

Eventually, she realized she wanted to work in pediatric healthcare.

"And when I found out that fundraising could be my career, I knew I wanted to be at this hospital, understanding that the care I received as a child ultimately saved my life," Hodge said.

She went on to earn a Master's Degree in ethics as a Knoxville Fellow, starting her career in philanthropy.

She maintained a long-held goal of working at ETCH, ultimately joining the staff in April 2023 as an annual giving officer.

Hodge has since become a major gifts officer, where she partners with individuals and families. Among those, one stood out.

"I was given the opportunity to meet a little girl who also had open-heart surgery, and that was within the first six months of me working at Children's Hospital," she said. "That felt so full-circle to me."

"I was able to talk to her and her family and say, 'Here I am now,' telling them I get to work here and advocate and raise funds for patients just like she is and I was. That was just a God moment."

It was not the only unique encounter



Photo submitted

Callie Hodge, pictured here at the age of 3.

ter Hodge has experienced. She also oversees the programming for the hospital's Women's Philanthropy Society, and she gets a firsthand look at the endurance these children showcase.

"When you're listening to these stories, it never gets old," Hodge said. "It's always emotional to see these kids — who are still just kids — yet they're so resilient and strong and exude so much hope and joy."

Hodge noted that she keeps pictures of some ETCH ambassadors at her desk in the development office. While their smiles and the building across the street drive Hodge, her own life provides the ultimate reminder.

"It's a gift to do what I do," Hodge said. "My life was spared because of God, ultimately, and the pediatric care I received."

~ Jake Nichols

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# National Wear Red Day brings awareness of women's heart health

American Heart Association representatives and Turkey Creek Medical Center staff joined Tennova Healthcare, Knox County and Town of Farragut officials in bringing awareness to heart health in women during the 2026 National Wear Red Day kickoff event in TCMC Friday, Feb. 6.

"It's exciting to have such a great group here today, a special day for us, for sure," said Tennova Healthcare CEO Tony Benton, who also is immediate past chair for AHA.

Dr. Richard Briggs, a cardiologist and state senator; Farragut Mayor Ron Williams and Alderman Drew Burnette; and Rhonda Smithson, community engagement coordinator with Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs's office were on hand for the kickoff.

"It's my honor to welcome you to this special proclamation event, as we declare today as our National Wear Red Day," Benton said. "Today, we come together to raise awareness about heart disease, the leading cause of death for both men and women, still, in the

United States."

"We're so thankful to have a place like Turkey Creek [Medical Center] that's in the community that puts patients first and brings awareness to medical issues that affect women, men all throughout our community," Burnette said before reading a proclamation from the Town of Farragut declaring Feb. 6 as National Wear Red Day.

"Whereas, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death among women in the United States, claiming lives of one in every three women each year and surpassing all forms of cancer combined," he read. "... and nearly half of the women over the age of 20 are living with some sort of cardiovascular disease yet most women remain unaware of their potential risk factors or unique ways heart disease can present in women."

"And ... women often experience heart attack symptoms that are different from men, such as shortness of breath, nausea, back or jaw pain, extreme fatigue or dizziness,

which can lead to delayed treatment and poor outcome ..." Burnette added before declaring National Wear Red Day.

"When I started medical school 52 years ago, there were so many misconceptions about heart disease in women," Briggs said. "And even today, if you did a survey with the general population, they would probably say the No. 1 killer of women is breast cancer."

"There's a lot about Pap smears, about all these other issues," he said. "Still, heart disease is killing more women than of these, and we have a lot of days for cancer awareness; but to me, this is why this is the most important."

Briggs recalled when he was in medical school in the 1970s, he was taught heart disease was primarily a disease in men and "it really doesn't involve women."

"We found out that's wrong" the cardiologist said. "We also know that the symptoms women have with heart disease are not the same as men."

"The problem is women are



Photo submitted

Tennova Healthcare dignitaries, Turkey Creek Medical Center staff and local officials gathered in a heart shape to commemorate wear Red for Women Day at Turkey Creek Medical Center on Friday, Feb. 6.

diagnosed later, after the damage is done," he said. "That's why Wear Red is so important."

"By wearing red, we are not only sharing our support

See WEAR RED on Page 7C

## Heart failure

From page 1C

tion of medical intervention, skilled doctors, her children and what she calls her "strong will" kept her going.

"I knew I had to come back and fight for my kids," she said. Her oldest is 42; her younger two are teenagers. "I'm living proof God has a sense of humor," she joked about the age gap.

Today, "I feel good," Lane said. "My ejection fraction [heart function] is up to 55, 60 percent. I've had no bouts of [atrial fibrillation] and no signs of heart failure right now, so life is good."

"Of course, I'm on a lot of medicines and my pacemaker

is helping a lot, too," she added.

Still, "I feel very blessed," Lane mused. "I am humble, thankful for the teams that knew what they were doing, thankful for my family and to God for letting me stay here for a few years longer."

"My biggest thing is gratitude," she added.

One physician stands out in her memory — the cardiologist on call the day she first arrived at the LaFollette ER.

"She's kept up with me since," Lane said. "Very compassionate and caring. When she told me I was going into heart failure, she sat down on the bed beside me and held me while I cried. She gave me so much comfort."

Looking back, Lane realizes

she didn't have the symptoms most people associate with a heart crisis. "That was the issue," she said. "I didn't have anything I thought was abnormal."

"The symptoms were things I had battled all my life, and I just thought I was having a flare of asthma, bronchitis," Lane said. "I just thought I was having a flare of reflux — nausea, vomiting — I just chalked that up to normal."

She even blamed an allergic reaction to mums in October 2023 and the rabbits her teens got for Christmas. "I thought, I'm allergic to rabbits. I'll get rid of them and everything will be fine."

"Well, January rolled around and I wasn't any bet-

ter," Lane said. "It was like I can't go upstairs, the increased fatigue, shortness of breath. I couldn't take a shower without having to stop and rest before I even complete my shower."

"That Monday morning, [on Feb. 19, 2024], I said, 'this is not right,'" she recalled. She went to work then called her allergist and said, "I'm just not getting any better."

The doctors prescribed steroids, which Lane took that evening. The next day, she was too fatigued to go back upstairs to get her sweater. But, she went to work and listened to her own heart.

"Imagine if you will, just taking a gallon jug, filling it up with liquids, turning it upside down. That's what my heart

sounded like," she said.

Lane went to the emergency room and had the staff listen.

"My heart rate was 200," she was told. She was taken to the ICU, where she was told her heart function was 30 to 35 percent.

"When I regained consciousness in Nashville, they told me the ejection fraction [heart function] was less than 10," Lane said. "I had no heart function, went into kidney failure, cardiogenic shock and all the stuff that came with that."

And because of allergic reaction, she required a tracheoscopy, she added.

A year later, Lane is home, healing and said she is grateful for a life she nearly lost.

~ Tammy Cheek

# Heart Health

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# Every Heart Matters

## Pilot launches annual Heart Month campaign to fight heart disease and stroke

Pilot, the largest travel center network in North America, is continuing its long-standing support of the American Heart Association (Heart Association) and Heart & Stroke to support heart health education, research and prevention efforts across the United States and Canada. From Jan. 30 through Feb. 22, Pilot invites guests to turn their everyday stops into moments of impact, helping fund the fight against heart disease and stroke, the leading and fifth-leading causes of death in the United States.

In 2026, Pilot's goal is to raise \$1 million to directly fuel the mission of saving lives. Now in its ninth campaign year with the Heart Association, Pilot and its guests have raised a total of nearly \$10 million.

"Heart disease and stroke affect millions of lives every year, including my own," said Julius Cox, executive vice president, chief people and administrative officer at Pilot and stroke survivor. "After overcoming my experience, I became even more committed to taking care of my personal health and encouraging others to do the same. Every dollar raised during the campaign helps fund groundbreaking research and equips communities with life-saving tools and education they need to keep more hearts beating."

Guests can visit participat-

ing Pilot, Flying J and One9 travel centers and take part in simple, meaningful actions that collectively make a life-saving difference:

- Paper Hearts and Round Up: Guests at U.S. locations can add a \$1, \$3 or \$5 paper heart or round up their in-store purchases to the nearest dollar at checkout, with 100 percent of proceeds benefiting the American Heart Association's Life is Why campaign. Guests at Canadian locations can round up their in-store purchases, with 100% of proceeds benefiting the Heart & Stroke in Canada\*

- Donate in the App: For the first time, guests can now donate \$1, \$3 or \$5 directly through the Pilot app when placing a mobile order, making it easier to support heart health with just a click

- Free Coffee Offer: To thank guests for their contributions, Pilot app users who join the "Heart Month Challenge" and purchase a paper heart in-store will receive an offer for a free coffee on their next visit.\*\*

"At Pilot, our purpose is to show people they matter at every turn and supporting heart health is one of the most meaningful ways we can live out that purpose," said Adrienne Ingoldt, senior vice president, communications, risk and procurement at Pilot and member of the American Heart Association's National Life is Why Council of Retailers. "We are grateful for our team members and the millions of guests who choose to support Heart Month. We want everyone to live longer, healthier lives through education, healthy diet, physical activity

and regular medical screenings."

Alongside the company's fundraising efforts, Pilot is committed to helping its team members take meaningful steps toward better heart health. During Heart Month, the company's team members will have access to hands-only CPR training, blood pressure resources and heart health education developed by the Heart Association to support prevention, awareness and lifesaving action. These trainings and resources are also available to the public by contacting the local Heart Association office.

Pilot's support of the Heart Association is fueled by the company's Miles of Good giving program. Additional details about Pilot's Heart Month campaign are available at [PilotCompany.com/heart](http://PilotCompany.com/heart)

month. Information about heart health programs and resources can be found at [heart.org](http://heart.org) and [heartandstroke.ca](http://heartandstroke.ca).

*\*Proud Life is Why Retailer. The full amount of each heart purchase and the round-up amount of each round-up purchase at Pilot Flying J owned and operated stores from 1/30/26-2/22/26 will be donated to the American Heart Association in the US and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. Certain purchases are not eligible for round-up contributions. Void where prohibited.*

*\*\*Valid from 1/30/26-2/22/26. Available only at participating locations. Limited to one free small Pilot hot coffee. myRewards account required. Not valid in Canada. Additional terms apply - see store for details.*

~ Story submitted



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## Wear Red

From page 5C

for those affected by heart disease, but also taking a stand to promote heart health and to encourage preventative measures," Benton said. "Tennova is proud to sponsor this day ... our commitment to heart health is unwavering, and we're dedicated to making a positive impact in our community."

"In collaboration with the American Heart Association, we're excited to enter the second year of an initiative to aid new mothers with hypertension," Benton said. "These new moms receive new mom kits, which include self-monitoring blood pressure devices and infant CPR kits, providing essential tools to help manage their health and ensure the safety of their families."

"Heart disease can often be silent, but its impact is profound," he said. "It affects our families, friends and our communities. However, through education, research and community support, we all can make a difference."

"The American Heart Association has been at the forefront of this fight, and I'm proud to be part of an organization that's dedicated to saving lives and improving heart health," Benton said. "Your presence and support are vital in spreading the message of heart health and encouraging others to take action."

"Today, we can create a healthier future for all of us," he added.

"Look around," said Kayla Smith, executive director of Knoxville AHA. "This is a national movement on national media today. It's really ground-swell awareness, and I think it's so fun and so important."

"It's an honor to stand with you once again to lift up the hearts and voices of women across our community," she said.

Not only is it a day to recognize wear red, but also Smith

said it was a day to recognize the "women whose stories, struggles and triumphs fill the work that we do."

"Heart disease continues to affect women in ways that are often overlooked and misunderstood," she said. "It doesn't always present with the symptoms we expect. It doesn't wait for the right time. It certainly doesn't discriminate."

"Yet, what gives me hope is what I see right here — a community willing to learn ..." Smith said. "Every time someone wears red, learns CPR, checks their numbers or talks openly about their heart health, it sends a powerful message that women's lives matter."

"Awareness is not passive; it is powerful," she said. "Our community continues to prove that progress happens when we show up for one another."

With that, Smith introduced Ananya Nair, a Webb School of Knoxville junior, "whose passion truly embodies the spirit of action."

Last year, Nair, the daughter of Lekshmi Seemanthini, an interventional cardiologist with Tennova Healthcare, "stepped forward as a Teen of Impact candidate, and what she accomplished was nothing short of extraordinary," Smith said.

In seven weeks, Nair rallied friends, family and the greater Knoxville community to raise more than \$80,000.

"Ananya, your leadership, your empathy and drive remind of us the next generation is not waiting for their moment; you're truly creating it," Smith said as she presented the girl with the Teen of Impact Award.

"I feel pretty strongly about women's health in general," Nair said in a separate interview and added the money raised will fund research in women's heart health.

The teen attributed her mother's influence in her drive to raise the money and concern for women's health.

"She comes home and talks



Tammy Cheek

Webb School of Knoxville junior Ananya Nair receives the Teen of Impact national award during the Wear Red for Women event.

about work," Nair said about her mother.

In continuing the event, "it's a privilege to stand with you today, as our local leaders unite to recognize National Wear Red Day here in Knox County," said Suzanne Thames, chief financial officer with Tennova Healthcare and 2026 Go Red for Women campaign chair. "Heart disease is the leading cause of death in all Americans, yet women continue to face unique risks. "Pregnancy-related complications, transitioning through menopause and everyday demands women shoulder can all influence heart health in ways that are too often overlooked," Thames said. "When women know their numbers — blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar — they gain the ability to protect their heart."

According to the AHA, nearly

45 percent of women over age 20 are living with some form of heart disease.

Rhonda Smithson, community engagement coordinator with Knox County mayor's office, said being at the event "is deeply personal for me."

"National Wear Red Day is such an important reminder that conversations like this matter," she said. "Women's heart health doesn't always get the attention it deserves. Today is about changing that."

"Awareness, education and action — women deserve to be heard," Smithson said. "We deserve to be listened to when we speak up about our health, our concerns and our experiences."

"We deserve strong advocates at every level who will stand up for us and ensure that we receive the care and attention that we deserve," she said.

~ Tammy Cheek



## Hearts and Heroes event set for Feb. 26

With February being American Heart Month, cardiac and stroke survivors are invited to a special event on Feb. 26. That night, the Hearts and Heroes event will take place at the American Heart Association's "Heart House" at 4708 Papermill Drive in Knoxville.

"Survivors are the heartbeat fueling the mission of the American Heart Association," the release stated. "This event is our way of honoring your journey and connecting you with others who share it."

The event will run from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., as the American Heart Association invites people to mingle with light refreshments and a chance to share their stories.

Attendees are asked to RSVP and send a photo to Mindy.Savage@heart.org.

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