The beat goes on
Heart patient lives life to the fullest

At 88 years old, Dirby Kober says she’s lived two lifetimes. It’s easy to understand why she’d think that. She was born in Wisconsin but moved to Montreal, Canada, after her father, a chemist, died in a mining accident in South Africa.

She came to New Jersey in junior high and then spent her high school years in Ohio and Texas. By this time, she could speak English, French and German. As a young woman she worked as an assistant in a pediatrician’s office, a casings inspector in an ammunitions factory during World War II and learned Swedish massage.

Soon she was married and raising five kids of her own. She’s lost three of them, but at age 65, she began to raise her granddaughter. She and her husband, Lester Kober, age 92, celebrated their 69th wedding anniversary last October and look forward to more lively years together.

Looking back, she recognizes the challenges. “I’ve lived a rich life,” she says. “The last 20 years have been more relaxed, but the first 60 years were a bit stressful.”

HEART CONDITION
Part of that stress in her early years may have come from her heart. At age 49, Dirby was diagnosed with atrial tachycardia, which she experienced as a fluttering in her chest.

When it first occurred, she saw her doctor who thought it might have been caused by too many cigarettes and coffee.

After reoccurring episodes, she saw a cardiologist who placed her on anti-arrhythmic medications. She followed that regimen for nearly a decade.

Soon her episodes happened more often and lasted longer. And the cardiac problems worsened — she was diagnosed with right bundle branch block, a condition where the electrical signals are absent between chambers on the right side of her heart.

That’s when she started to see cardiologist and electrophysiologist Koroush Khalighi, MD, an independent member of the medical staff at Easton Hospital.

“I have complete confidence in him,” she says. “For the past 20 years, I’ve never had a second opinion.”

High praise from a woman who has learned everything about her condition.

Dr. Khalighi recently suggested that Dirby consider cardiac ablation, procedure that maps the heart to determine where the electric signals are irregular so that the abnormal tissue can be normalized.

Though legally blind since 1981, Dirby taught herself how to use a computer in 1997. As with any new procedure or medication, she did her research before agreeing to undergo ablation.

“I do everything whole hog, not by half measure” says Dirby.

Following a few diagnostic tests, Dirby had the ablation. Afterward, she felt well and in high spirits.

“The care at Easton Hospital was excellent, which some people may find hard to believe,” she says. “But the staff in the cardiac electrophysiology lab were excellent. They knew what they were doing. That’s coming from someone who is not an easy patient.”

WORKING OUT
While Dirby is still taking time to heal, she is back to the gym. She usually likes to swim, use the circuit and hit the free weights, but during recovery she’s concentrated on keeping her core strong until she can get back to her normal routine.

“I like to challenge myself,” she says. “You have to or else you don’t get anywhere in life.”

She’s been speaking out about her procedure and answers the questions of other people who suffer from the same condition.

“I’m proud of myself to have the wherewithal to go through with this,” she says. “I’m so happy that I’ve done it.”

Photo courtesy of Easton Hospital