

LAST WISHES

When Chuck Ward was a city firefighter, he was the first one into the burning building and the last one out, says his wife of 30 years, Dotti Ward. Every day of his retirement, he walked four miles, lifted weights, and played the trumpet for at least two hours. If he heard the U.S. Marines Hymn, the corps veteran stood at attention. Then at 74, Ward's lungs began to fail him. He was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF). Doctors don't know why the condition causes lungs to scar and thicken, and most patients don't recover.

In typical Chuck-Ward style, he didn't sit idle on hearing the news. Shortly after he was diagnosed, Ward pulled his wife aside and told her he wanted to donate his lungs for research.

"If I could keep one man from going through what we're going through right now, it would be worth it," he said.

Ward, who died on May 19, 2003, was probably the first patient to donate his lungs for IPF research. To be useful, the lung must be studied within hours after death, which requires a "rapid autopsy." His gift inspired 13 other patients in the UPMC Simmons Center for Interstitial Lung Diseases IPF support group, which he attended faithfully, to do the same. Those gifts have given doctors at Pitt an extraordinary opportunity to delve into the genetics behind IPF.

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