

# SWEDESBORO-WOOLWICH

## NEIGHBORS

**A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE:  
JOHN PAUL CAVALIERI'S  
INSPIRING  
JOURNEY**

# A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE: JOHN PAUL CAVALIERI'S INSPIRING JOURNEY

BY MATTHEW RAPPA



The story of Swedesboro's **John Paul Cavalieri** embodies resilience and hope. John Paul is not just a husband and father to eight children; he is also a heart transplant recipient who has turned his life-altering experience into a mission to help others.

John Paul's journey, marked by an unexpected accident and a subsequent medical crisis, has given him a unique perspective on life, love, and the gift of giving back.

## **The Accident That Changed Everything**

In May 2019, while working on a construction project, John Paul suffered an electrical shock he initially shrugged off as a mere workplace incident. However, over the following months, he began experiencing alarming symptoms, including severe bloating and difficulty breathing. After a series of tests, he received a devastating diagnosis: congestive heart failure. His heart was functioning at a mere 5% to 10%, far below the normal range of 50% to 70%.

"I thought I'd die; there were no other options," John Paul recalls, reflecting on those dark days when he felt his health deteriorating.

Despite the grim prognosis, John Paul was determined to fight for his life and for the future he envisioned with his then-fiancée, **Michele**.

## **Love Against All Odds**

A week before his wedding, John Paul's condition worsened dramatically, landing him back in the hospital just as he was preparing for a joyous life event. Doctors warned him he was days away from losing his life. But with an incredible medical team by his side and a relentless spirit, John Paul was stabilized just in time to exchange vows with Michele in June 2022.

*Photos by Gundrum Photography*



On September 6, 2022, a miracle occurred: John Paul received a new heart. It was the heart of **Jack Robert Sinnott**, a young man whose life was tragically cut short but whose spirit would live on through John Paul. The connection between the two families — Cavalieri and Sinnott — has since blossomed into a heartwarming bond, fueled by shared grief and gratitude.

"My wife managed to hold everything together, juggling a full-time job, visiting me in the hospital, and still finding time to respond to the constant stream of calls and texts from friends and family," says John Paul. "Her unwavering support during such a difficult time truly kept our family strong. I couldn't have made it through without her."

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"Nothing would keep me from my wedding," he says with a smile. The couple, who met online in July 2020, had quickly fallen in love and had forged a bond that transcended their individual challenges. Their wedding took place in the very backyard where they had envisioned creating memories as a family.

"One of our best memories together is our first date at Penn's Landing and Rittenhouse Square, where we

both felt we were meant for each other from the start," says Michele. "We met online on Bumble, and although we crossed paths many times in life before, we didn't actually meet until that moment!"

### The Long Road to Recovery

Following the wedding, John Paul's health continued to decline. By August 2022, after several failed treatments, he found himself back in the hospital, where he was told he would need a heart transplant to survive. His situation became critical as doctors explored life-support options like a heart pump and eventually ECMO, or extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, a life-support therapy that uses a machine to temporarily perform the functions of the heart and lungs. Both were last-ditch efforts to keep John Paul alive.



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### The Gift of Life

John Paul's experience didn't just change his life; it ignited a passion for advocacy. Grateful for his second chance, he and Michele founded The Jack Sinnott Foundation to honor Jack's memory. The foundation aims to raise awareness about organ donation, provide support for transplant

recipients, and promote heart-healthy living.

"I don't take life for granted," John Paul states emphatically. "Every day is a gift, and I want Jack's legacy to continue inspiring others."

The foundation serves as a beacon of hope for families navigating the complexities of transplantation and organ donation.

### Family Life and New Beginnings

John Paul and Michele are devoted parents to their eight children, whose ages range from 6 to 29. **Taylor, Mason, Shay, Bella, Jack, Cole, Hunter, and Ethan** each have unique personalities and aspirations, and the couple instills in them the importance of family, compassion, and service.

With more than 25 years in the construction industry, John Paul began his career as a union carpenter and eventually rose to executive roles, even owning his own construction firm, Cavalieri Construction. Currently, he is pursuing a diploma in ministry leadership at True North College and co-leads a men's Bible study group at True North Church.

"I am also in the process of writing a book about my heart transplant journey," John Paul says.

Michele, meanwhile, has dedicated her career to the hospitality industry and currently works at Citizens Bank Park. Recently, she obtained her real estate license and became a real estate agent at Romano Realty in Mullica Hill. Inspired by her husband's experience, Michele aspires to write a children's book that teaches kids how to cope with having loved ones in the hospital.

The Cavalieris are actively involved in their community. They love spending time outdoors, whether it's gardening, relaxing at the beach, or attending a Philadelphia sports event. Despite their busy lives, family remains paramount. The Cavalieri family would not be complete without their energetic golden retriever, **Gia**.



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## A Message of Hope

As part of his recovery, John Paul has used social media platforms to connect with others facing similar health challenges. He shares his story to inspire hope and encourage discussions about organ donation, engaging with followers and fellow patients in real time.

“Helping others is gratifying,” shares John Paul, whose advocacy efforts have culminated in memorable moments, like running up the iconic Rocky Steps in Philadelphia on the anniversary of his transplant — a symbolic representation of triumph over adversity.

## The Legacy of Jack Sinnott

Jack Sinnott was remembered not just as a donor but as a young man of immense character and kindness. His mother, Cherie, describes him as a pure soul filled with love. The connection between the Sinnott and Cavalieri families has blossomed into a relationship where they support each other in honoring Jack’s legacy.

“Jack’s generosity didn’t just save my life; it continues to touch others,” John Paul says. Their families have united for events like the annual Donor Dash, where they run together in Jack’s honor, spreading awareness and celebrating the impact of organ donation.



## Looking to the Future

As John Paul looks ahead, he envisions a future where he can continue his advocacy work while cherishing the moments spent with his family. With plans to expand The Jack Sinnott Foundation’s reach and impact, he aims to create a supportive community for those in need.

“We want Jack’s memory kept alive,” John Paul says. “His heart beats in me, and through my actions, I hope to reflect the kindness he embodied.”

John Paul’s story is one of resilience, love, and the remarkable power of community. As he continues to navigate life post-transplant, he remains committed to using his journey to inspire hope in others, ensuring every heartbeat counts.

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