

Everyman astronaut Greg Olsen repays Deborah Hospital with giant donation



Greg Olsen is not an astronaut. But in 2005, he went to space. Deborah Heart and Lung Center was the reason why.

As a kid, Greg Olsen had two dreams: to play Major League Baseball and go to space. You know, nothing major.

Olsen never made the major leagues, but in October 2005, at age 60, Olsen got to space. And the Deborah Heart and Lung Center was the reason why.

In the spring of 2005, Deborah pulmonologist Dr. David Murphy examined a black spot on Olsen's lung and determined that it was benign. Murphy's determination allowed Olsen to ride on the Russian Soyuz rocket TMA-7 as a private citizen.

He was just the third private citizen in history to travel to the International Space Station, a space station that orbits the Earth. The trip was a joint effort between the United States and Russia, since a new operation crew travels up to the station every three months to replace the old operation crew.

Olsen enjoyed the experience as much as he thought he would as a kid. In the 14 years since the trip, Olsen has “thought about it every day,” he said, and given over 600 talks at schools, universities, hospitals and senior citizen centers about what it’s like to travel to space as a civilian. But since Olsen never would have had this life-changing experience without Murphy, he remains eternally grateful,

and he has maintained his relationship with Murphy and the Browns Mills hospital ever since. As a result, the Deborah Heart and Lung Center views Olsen as a shining example of the importance of its work.

That’s why on Saturday, at the Hilton Philadelphia at Penn’s Landing, Olsen was the Gala Honoree at the Deborah Hospital Foundation’s 14th Annual Red Tie Gala.

Except he did not just receive an honor. He also honored the hospital in return.



Greg Olsen and Dr. David Murphy

During a speech at the Red Tie Gala to more than 350 Deborah supporters, Olsen announced that he would be giving \$5 million to New Jersey’s only specialty cardiac, pulmonary and vascular hospital.

“I want to do it,” Olsen said. “It’s not just me owing them.”

But Olsen definitely owes Deborah, too, and he knows that. Murphy and the hospital gave him the experience of his life.

Olsen, the CEO of the Princeton-based GHO Ventures LLC., where he manages a series of angel investments, can still recall his space trip in vivid detail.

First, Olsen remembers taking off.

And third, he recollects orbiting the Earth every 90 minutes, 250 miles above the Earth.

“It was just a big blue sphere,” Olsen said.

The everyman astronaut will never top going to space. That’s why he thinks about it every day and talks about it to anyone who will listen.

But he still has a zest for life down here in the big blue sphere, and Murphy and Deborah are still helping him stay healthy for whatever he may want to do next.

“I go for check ups all the time,” Olsen said. “They keep me healthy.”

It’s a mutually beneficial relationship, and now, after Olsen’s massive donation to the hospital, it will remain one for the foreseeable future.

Olsen’s gift launched an initiative called Deborah 100: The Campaign, “a multi-year initiative to add new patient floors all with private inpatient suites,” according to a hospital news release.

Deborah 100 will ultimately be a \$50 million-plus project that will culminate with the 100th anniversary of the Heart and Lung Center in 2022. The project will also implement a new design

and upgrades to the latest technology.

The Deborah Heart and Lung Center prides itself on having “never rendered a bill to a patient for the life-saving services Deborah provides at its main hospital building,” said the news release for the Red Tie Gala.

“The foundation’s gala is one way that the hospital is able to fund this mission,” the release added.

A massive donation from a civilian astronaut is another way.