

# Long-Distance Healing

Chronic back pain patient from Indiana finds a new life at Hillcrest

By Sherri Kightlinger

Indiana steel mill inspector Thomas Breese is tough enough. He regularly rotates among all three shifts to get the job done. But when debilitating pain in his lower back caused his right leg to feel like it was on fire an hour after arriving at work, he was barely able to finish his shift.

"The pain was so intense I couldn't stand it anymore," says Breese, then 52. "I worked with pain and slept with pain. It was pain 24/7, and it was taking my life away."

## Finding Hope

Off work for a few months, Breese didn't find any help in his hometown of LaPorte, Ind. That's when a neurosurgeon told him his MRI revealed he had three degenerative discs and arthritis in his lower back. Breese tried physical therapy and pain medication under the doctor's orders, but didn't find any relief. Adding insult to injury, the neurosurgeon suggested he do his best to stick it out at work and get a wheelchair for living out the

rest of his life. A few weeks later, a certified hand therapist evaluated him according to his company's orders, but he was sent back to work without restrictions.

Breese was upset by this news, but not nearly as disturbed as his wife, Kathryn. She immediately researched pain management healthcare leaders in the U.S. "There has to be someone out there who can help," she told her husband. She made an appointment at the Cleveland Clinic (CC) Spine Institute, and a few weeks later, Kathryn and Thomas drove 310 miles to Cleveland.

"Our trip took forever because we had to stop at every rest area so I could get out and stretch," Breese explains. "When we arrived, I could barely walk up the steps. I was ready for some good news."

Breese met that morning for an evaluation with CC Spine Institute physician Anantha Reddy, M.D. "I was thrilled that for the first time a doctor gave me hope for my pain," Breese remembers. "He told me that we don't disable, we heal." The next

morning, he and his wife drove to Cleveland Clinic Pain Management at Hillcrest Hospital. That's when Breese met Teresa Dews, M.D., who is board-certified in interventional pain management and anesthesiology. Breese and his wife finally found their hope.

## A Lifesaver

Dr. Dews performed a comprehensive evaluation of Breese's condition and outlined her recommendations to him. "Mr. Breese had chronic

lower back pain caused by three degenerative discs and the arthritic process," Dr. Dews explains.

"She was upfront, honest and sincere," Breese says. "Because I was walking like an old man and could hardly move, I was agreeable to just about anything she recommended."

That same day, Breese's first treatment began with a nerve block. The treatment involved placing a very small needle near the facet joint in the spine. Facet joints are located on the sides of the spine,

away from the spinal cord. When successful at reducing pain, additional nerve blocks are prescribed.

"On the way home from the nerve block, I was sleepy and dozed off in the car. Right before we arrived home after our six-hour drive, I became very excited. This panicked my wife who asked me what was wrong. I could actually feel the pain in my leg diminish. I felt great," remembers a thankful Breese. Because Breese had a positive response, Dr. Dews recommended using a local physician in Breese's hometown for additional nerve blocks.

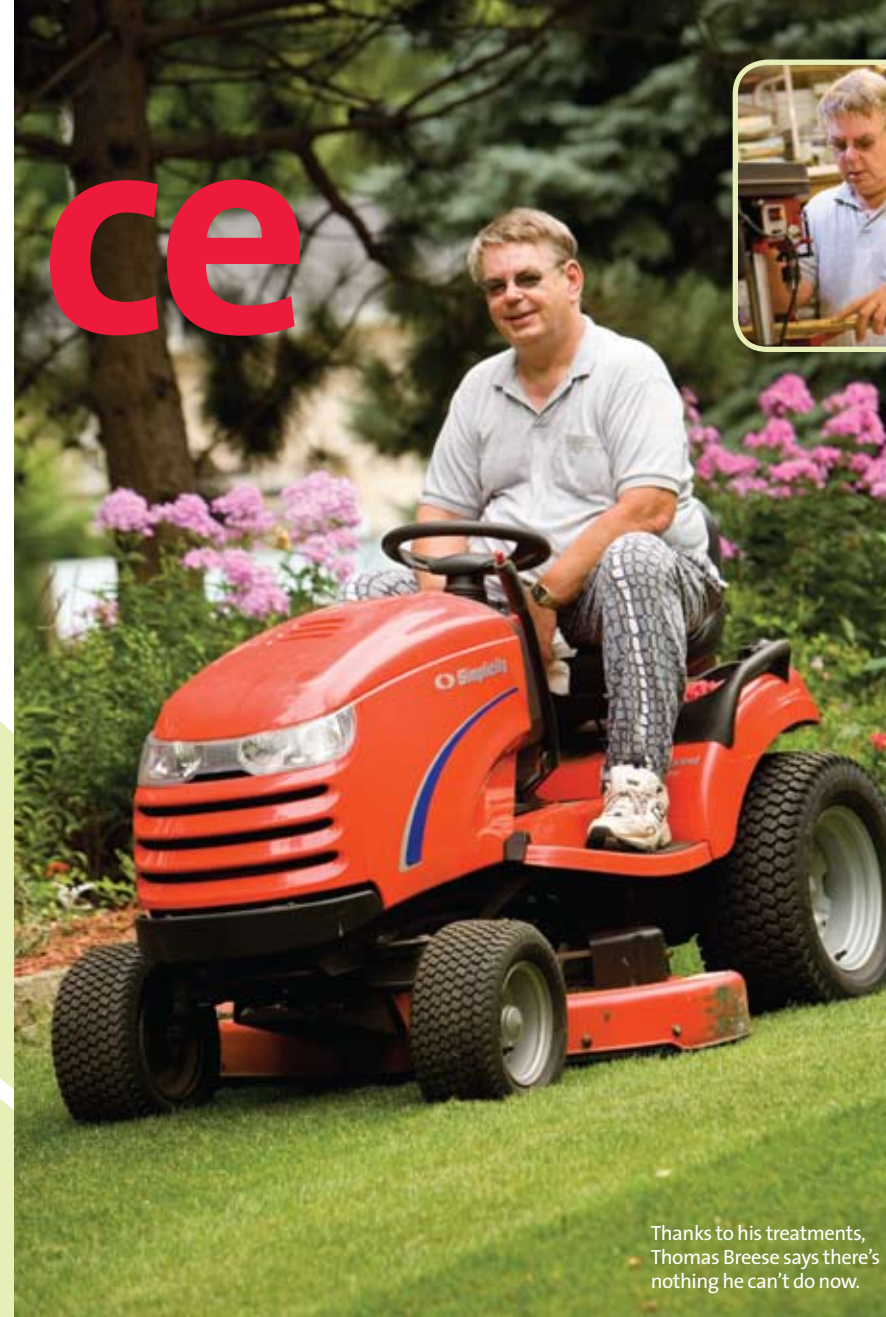
He received his second and third nerve block in Indiana. "The second procedure was OK, but the third one was quite painful," Breese says. "I decided then that Dr. Dews was the only one touching my spine."

At a return trip to Hillcrest this past spring, Dr. Dews performed radiofrequency ablation on Breese, now 58. "The procedure involves taking a small probe that is inserted by the nerve in the spine. This heats up the tissues to purposely damage the nerve to decrease pain," Dr. Dews explains. "Mr. Breese had an excellent response to this, and his long-term prognosis is good."

Radiofrequency ablation involves high-tech fluoroscopy equipment and advanced training. It's not commonly performed in pain management centers.

While Breese is not entirely pain-free, he is significantly better. "I'm back at work and working all three shifts as required," he says. "I'm also sleeping through the night and able to work in my backyard. Really, there's nothing I can't do now."

"Dr. Dews has given me my life back," Breese concludes. ■



Thanks to his treatments, Thomas Breese says there's nothing he can't do now.



Teresa Dews, M.D., board-certified in interventional pain management and anesthesiology, gave Thomas Breese hope—and a better life.