

At 96, Dr. Heimlich finally uses his life-saving technique



Kevin Grasha, kgrasha@enquirer.com 10:47 p.m. EDT May 26, 2016



(Photo: Enquirer file)

When he heard that a resident was choking, Perry Gaines, maître d' for the Deupree House dining room, ran toward the table.

Gaines has been trained in the Heimlich maneuver and has performed it at least twice in the two years he has worked at the Hyde Park senior living facility.

When Gaines arrived at the table, Dr. Henry Heimlich, a 96-year-old resident of the Deupree House who invented the famous technique for clearing a blocked airway, was standing behind the woman, ready to perform it.

Typically, a staff member would do it. "But," Gaines said, pausing, "it is Dr. Heimlich."

Heimlich, who swims and exercises regularly, was able to dislodge a piece of hamburger that had become stuck in 87-year-old Patty Ris's airway.

Gaines said the entire room, filled with 125 diners, focused on the table, which was near the center of the room. Ris recovered quickly, and everyone returned to their meals.

Monday's incident at the Deupree House was the first time Heimlich, who has demonstrated the maneuver countless times since inventing it in the 1970s, used it to stop someone from choking, he said.

In a telephone interview Thursday, Heimlich recounted what happened. He said Ris had been sitting next to him at his table.

"When I used it, and she recovered quickly," he said, "it made me appreciate how wonderful it has been to be able to save all those lives."



Patty Ris (Photo: Provided/AndyHemmer.com PR)

His son, Phil Heimlich, said his father regularly meets people who were either saved or saved somebody else.

"Just fact that a 96-year-old man could perform that, is impressive," he said.

Bryan Reynolds, a spokesman for Episcopal Retirement Services, which owns the Deupree House, described the elder Heimlich as very active for his age. He has lived there about six years, Reynolds said.

"He goes to the dining room every evening," Reynolds said.

In a video interview provided to The Enquirer, Ris said she penned a note to Heimlich.

It read, she recalled in the video: "God put me in this seat next to you."

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