

Big loser

A RESTAURATEUR KEEPS HIS NEW, TRIMMER PHYSIQUE—WHILE SURROUNDED BY FOOD



A shadow of his former self, Steve Bidgood eats well and exercises to maintain his weight loss after having gastric bypass surgery.

SING THE PRAISES OF STEVE BIDGOOD and you'll get no argument on the Jersey Shore. The 51-year-old Eatontown resident, who runs Rumson's Salt Creek Grille as regional partner, is generous to many local causes, including Kidz Kare, a group of teenaged volunteers cofounded by his daughter Shauna, 16, who raise money to buy things to brighten the experience of patients at The Children's Hospital at Monmouth Medical Center. Whenever anyone orders a certain entrée at the eatery, Bidgood donates \$1 to the group. He also sponsors a fundraising dinner and auction, and by year's end expects to have raised close to \$60,000 for Kidz Kare.

But perhaps the greatest testament to Bidgood's character is his silhouette. He tipped the scales at 422 pounds just a few years ago; today he's a healthy 230. His

waist size has shrunk from 56 to 40. He has more energy, his knees don't ache and he's no longer always out of breath. He thanks weight-loss surgery for this transformation—but it also took a firm commitment to a new lifestyle.

"I was always big," Bidgood recalls. "I weighed 225 pounds in high school." But sports kept him fit. After college, though, he began working for a large restaurant chain that took him from his native New Jersey to stops around the country. Everywhere he went, he ate. "I was what's known in the food business as a 'grazer,'" he says. "The chef would bring out samples and I'd taste them all."

Thus began a 25-year period of "yo-yoing"—gaining, losing and then regaining weight. "I lost more than 100 pounds five times," he says. "Each time I put it back on, and more." In 2000, after he regained all of the 120 pounds he had recently lost, he was at his heaviest weight ever. "A friend of mine told me I was going to die," he says. "My family was very worried about me." That's when he heard about the option of gastric bypass surgery.

By then Bidgood had moved back to New Jersey with his wife, Lynn, and daughters Megan (now 18) and Shauna. He consulted Frank Borao, M.D., director of Monmouth's Bariatric Surgery Center and its Center for Minimally Invasive Surgery. At first, Dr. Borao wondered if Bidgood could stick with the strict post-surgery diet patients must follow, because his work surrounded him by food. But he convinced Dr. Borao that he understood the challenge and was ready. The operation took place at Monmouth in April 2004. And Bidgood kept his word.

Changing his eating habits and exercising several times a week, he lost 200 pounds the first year after his surgery. He was so proud that he flew his size-56 pants from the flagpole at his restaurant. "He's been a real success story," says Dr. Borao.

Since then, Bidgood has become something of an ambassador for weight-loss surgery, touting its success while preaching the necessity of hard work and individual responsibility. "I want obese people to understand that while the results are fantastic, it is not easy to adjust your lifestyle," he says. "The surgery is not a cure-all; it's a tool."

Friends who haven't seen Bidgood in years are often shocked at the change in him, so he keeps his old pants in his car. "When they say, 'I thought you were a much *bigger* man,'" he reports, "I run out and get the pants." ■