

# Delray Forum

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## PEOPLE

### Risky Surgery Gives Lake Worth Resident a New Lease on Life

September 9, 2011

#### Risky surgery gives Lake Worth resident new lease on life

Debra Koutsodontis suffered a massive heart attack on June 7. Told that little could be done to fix her ailing heart, the Lake Worth resident was given a year to live.

Then she got a second opinion from Dr. Richard Cartledge, a heart surgeon based in Delray Beach.

Koutsodontis had been taken to Boca Raton Community Hospital after her heart attack and was told she needed triple-bypass surgery. In 2004, she had received radiation therapy after being diagnosed with lung cancer, and the treatment had affected her heart.

"Because of the amount of scar tissue from those procedures, no doctor I could find was willing to do surgery," she said. "I was encouraged to go on meds and was sent home. Because my heart was fused to my

lungs, no one would take care of me."

Cartledge, a cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon, said he understood why other surgeons were reluctant to perform the procedure.

"Due to the radiation, her heart was stuck to her lungs," he said. "[It was] similar to pouring concrete and letting it set. There was a risk of death.

"Not offering her surgery would probably give her a year to live."

On June 9, Cartledge performed a five-hour triple-bypass operation on Koutsodontis at Delray Medical Center.

Instead of breaking the sternum with a sternal saw, he made a skin incision between Koutsodontis's breasts and used stainless steel surgical retractors to come up underneath the rib cage



**LIFESAVER** Delray Beach heart surgeon Dr. Richard Cartledge performed surgery on Lake Worth resident Debra Koutsodontis, who was a high-risk patient after beam radiation seven years earlier caused thick scar tissue above her heart. PHOTO/DAVID DIPINO

and separate her heart from her chest wall.

By not cutting the sternum, Cartledge spared Koutsodontis the customary eight-month recovery process. Speaking at his office in late August, she said she felt good. "Not yet 100 percent, but damn close to it," she said. "I can take deep breaths now and not feel like my chest is hardened cement."

Cartledge said the reason for Koutsodontis's speedy recovery

was the treatment she received at Delray Medical Center immediately following the surgery.

"They have the best OR and ICU teams in the county," he said. "That's why I only operate at Delray Medical Center."

Koutsodontis said she spent four days in the ICU and had a nurse near her at all times.

"The team got me right up and moving," she said. "They were right on it. At one point, I remember there was a nurse stationed at

a desk in my room."

Koutsodontis is a nurse herself. She works at Sunrise Detox and only had to take seven weeks off for her surgery and recovery.

"It was very smooth," said her daughter Jennifer Koutsodontis. "It was a great transition. At Delray Medical Center, they were in her room working on getting her better the minute she came out of surgery."

Debra Koutsodontis said she was confident from the beginning that Cartledge could do the surgery. "I knew I could trust him with my life," she said. "I thank him from the bottom of my new heart."

Dr. Richard Cartledge's office is located at 5210 Linton Blvd. For more information, call Cartledge at 561-499-7707 or Delray Medical Center at 561-498-4440, or visit [www.delraymedicalctr.com](http://www.delraymedicalctr.com).