It wasn’t supposed to be like this. When Steve Apple envisioned his retirement a few years back, he saw himself gardening, fishing, working on his vintage vehicles and more importantly, playing with his three granddaughters. His reality was far from that. When he retired in January as plant manager for Applied Materials Finishing, he found himself limping to the mailbox. “It took me forever to get the newspaper,” he recalled. His right hip hurt when he bent over to tie his shoes or pull weeds and playing with his granddaughters wasn’t even in the picture.

The pain kept getting worse. When Steve couldn’t handle the pain any more and realized he didn’t want to live like this, he visited his physician. “My doctor referred me to Dr. Knapic of the WCH Joint Center, who changed my life,” said Steve. “I would never have imagined within a few days of hip replacement surgery, I’d be pain free.”

All surgeries come with some trepidation, and Steve’s was no exception. What reassured him was his pre-surgery education and having others to walk through it with him.

“My doctor referred me to Dr. Knapic of the WCH Joint Center, who changed my life — Steve Apple

“Before surgery, I met with three other patients who were scheduled for a hip replacement. We had a pre-surgery meeting where we got to ‘make friends’ with our new hips,” Steve said. “We got to see them, touch them and envision how they would function inside us. We learned the importance of doing our exercises before and after surgery.”

Post surgery, the group had their meals together and some physical therapy. “It gave us a chance to share our experiences. It was just nice knowing you weren’t the only one going through it,” said Steve. “I bonded well with some of the patients.”

“The patient’s family or coach is encouraged to attend the pre-surgery class,” said Stacey Beun, RN, manager of the Joint Center. “This provides an extra set of ears and helps educate family on how they can support the patient when they return home.

“Group education and therapy provide camaraderie between participants as well as healthy competition,” said Stacey. “Patients encourage one another during therapy sessions. When someone is hesitant to move, watching others and receiving encouragement helps them progress.”
“Steve was a candidate for anterior hip replacement,” said Dr. Knapic. “This approach allows us to work between the patient’s muscles and tissue without detaching them. It provides for the potential for less pain, faster recovery and improved mobility because the muscle tissues are spared during the procedure. Steve bonded well with the other patients and recovered quickly,” said Dr. Knapic. “He was an ideal patient and a joy to work with. It’s always rewarding to see your patients enjoying life pain free again.”

Within days of his surgery, Steve was off all pain medication and driving with no restrictions. Dr. Knapic was such a “kind compassionate individual,” said Steve. “He explained everything up front. The WCH Joint Center staff are outstanding.”

So Steve had no hesitations recommending Dr. Knapic and WCH to his brother, Thomas, when his hip pain became unbearable.

For Thomas, of West Lafayette, the final straw was barely being able to make it through the annual Killbuck Parade. “I was in such pain I could barely finish the parade,” he said. “I knew I had to do something.”

At his brother’s recommendation, Thomas scheduled an appointment with Dr. Knapic. He had hip replacement surgery in August of 2014 with his brother by his side as his coach. “It was so nice to have him there,” said Thomas. “He knew all the doctors, nurses and therapists and could tell me what to expect.” Having identical surgeries so close together also sparked some sibling rivalry. “I wanted to do what he could do and beat him at it if I could,” Thomas admitted.

Within a month, Thomas, who lives on a small farm, was back to walking the woods and chopping wood.

“I can’t say enough good about Dr. Knapic and WCH,” said Thomas. “They were all so professional and caring. It was such a positive experience in every way. I should have done it sooner.”

Stacey credits much of the recovery to the group experience and for Thomas, having his brother as his coach. “Steve and Thomas were very social and enjoyed the camaraderie of being in the group. In general, the group atmosphere lifts the patients’ spirits and provides a fun approach to recovery.”

Dr. Knapic is optimistic about the group approach and the future of the center, which includes the addition of Dr. Widmer this fall. “I look forward to continuing to further build the joint center volume. I think Dr. Widmer’s addition in September 2015 will also be huge for us. He will bring subspecialty training in dealing with more complex joint replacements and revision joint replacement.”