



JUNFU HAN/DETROIT FREE PRES Mike Imbrunnone and Diane Wade enjoy the show.

SHIP'S AHOY! Vintage race boats get their day again at Belle Isle METRO, 4A

POLITICS Governors give revised health care flat reaction NATION+WORLD, 3A

WHAT A BURGER! There's no one way to make a great burger LIFE, 1D

THE FACE SAVIOR

Beaumont plastic surgeon takes on what others said couldn't be done, gives patients new life



Dr. Kongkrit Chaiyasate greets Charlotte Ponce, 14, of Spring Lake before explaining her latest surgery to her and her family at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. Charlotte's face was disfigured by a raccoon when she was a baby.

By Allie Gross Detroit Free Press

In December 2016, Tim

much thought. It was part of the hockey rigamarole, something he learned to do at age 11 as a precaution, without much thought about why — like putting on a safety, body and, most notably, his resilience. This day would demonstrate how much a gutsy and compassionate surgeon at Beaumont Hospital, Kongkrit Chaiyasate, had been able to help McGrath overcome what seemed like the impossible: the loss of his human shield, the skin on his face. For three years McGrath had been battling cancer. There had been sleepless nights, stressful decision-making, dispiriting See **FACES**, Page 10A



Simmering tensions



TOM VENALECK/DETROIT FREE PRESS Kids sing to Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, who was Irish, in March 1967 in honor of St. Patrick's Day.

City's black community reached a breaking point

Police harassment fueled anger; officials thought progressive reputation would curb unrest

By Bill McGraw Detroit Free Press special writer

Editor's note: This is the first installment in a three-part series exploring the 1967 Detroit riot. Today's story looks at the building tensions leading into the riot. Next Sunday, the 50th anniversary of the start of the riot, the Free Press will look at the five days of violence that tore apart the city beginning on



A RAINY DAY Rest of the week? Perfect FORECAST, 2A

INDEX

Bridge2L	
Business1B	Mi Best Life . 1D
Corrections2A	Lottery2A
Deaths20A	Metro4A
Free Press	Movies8E
editorials15A	Puzzles 2-3L
Detroit News	Real Estate1F
editorials24A	Sports1C
Entertainment .1E	Travel6E

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slowly began padding himself with his hockey gear: shoulder pads, a chest protector, elbow pads, protective gloves, a helmet — equipment athletes don to shield their bodies from potential trauma on the ice.

Previously, McGrath, who lives in Sterling Heights, wouldn't have given the task seat belt in a car.

This winter morning, however, the skate session was different.

It was McGrath's first time on the ice in two years, and the day was anything but an afterthought. It was planned with meaning and intention, finely focused on the then-37-year-old's

Mich. pot campaign attracts diverse donors

Critics are worried over Big Tobacco's influence

By Bill Laitner Detroit Free Press

A campaign to once again try to fully legalize marijuana in Michigan is getting big support from a Washington D.C. nonprofit activist group and from a tobacco store company that has talked of opening a chain of marijuana shops in the state.

The donor list, revealed in the

latest campaign finance statements filed by the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol, alarmed critics who have long contended that marijuana's nationwide march toward legalization is being funded not by the idealistic stoners and medicalmarijuana users long linked to the politics of cannabis but instead by a pack of profit-minded investors and corporate types said to be similar to Big Tobacco — the nation's cigarette and cigar industry.

"It's obvious that these tobac-

PROPOSAL WOULD PUT DISPENSARIES NEAR PARKS 4A

co guys are making a play for the marijuana money," Jeff Zinsmeister, executive vice president of Smart Alternatives to Marijuana, based in Alexandria, Va., said Friday. The group argues that Big Marijuana is "following the playbook of Big Tobacco," hoping to get young people addicted to pot See **POT**, Page 12A July 23, 1967. The following Sunday, we'll explore the aftermath of the riot and its longterm effects on Detroit.

In May 1967, Jerome Patrick Cavanagh was Detroit's young, white, vigorous, New Deal Democrat mayor. He had a glowing national reputation but an increasingly unhappy police department and a growing number of frustrated black constituents.

The cops wanted higher salaries. They protested with a ticket-writing slowdown and, later, a "blue flu" strike in which 20% of the 4,380-member force called in sick one day in June, a stunt that put a nervous city further on edge.

The mayor was forced to take the unusual action of going on local television to defend his officers.

"The police, obviously, are doing their job," Cavanagh said. "And doing it well."

Not everyone thought so. About 200 leaders in Detroit's black community debated that month filing a lawsuit against the police because of constant complaints from residents about brutality and the failure of the department to take black crime victims seriously.

See **DETROIT '67,** Page 8A







SALWAN GEORGES/DETROIT FREE PRESS Dr. Kongkrit Chaiyasate walks with Denis Chubanyuk, 5, and his mother, Elena Chubanyuk, during a checkup visit at Beaumont Hospital.

FACES: Physician takes tough cases

FROM PAGE 1A

chemotherapy, tests, crowd-funding campaigns and lots of uncertainty. While McGrath kept up hope through it all, in 2015 his faith was tested. Following a radical surgery to remove the thriving tumor, McGrath's body reacted negatively. While the growth, which had gotten so big it sprouted from his mouth, was gone, so was the entire left side of his face. The former electrician found himself with a gaping wound - his brain and skeleton exposed.

Superficial aesthetics aside, the situation was dangerous and risky. McGrath went from having a face swollen from a disease within to having a face completely exposed, susceptible to diseases. Infections became common. Surgeons, afraid of failure or worsening the situation, backed away. Death was accepted as inevitable.

But then, Dr. Chaiyasate entered the picture.

In any other century, survival from a tumor this aggressive, that had progressed so far would have been impossible. However, with modern medicine and a creative doctor, McGrath was able to not only survive the tumor resection but, through a series of operations, his wound was closed. Chaiyasate not only saved McGrath's life, but he gave him motivation to truly live it. It's why on a mild December morning, eight months after Chaiyasate first operated, the guy who thought the end was near was back on the ice. In the summer of 2013, McGrath began to feel discomfort in his jaw. He visited the dentist a few times thinking he had TMJ, a fairly common joint disorder, and was fitted with various appliances. When the pain persisted, McGrath continued visiting physicians. Finally, in January 2014, six months after the pain started, a doctor suggested an MRI. By the end of the day, McGrath learned he had synovial cell sarcoma, a rare form of soft tissue cancer that is typically caused by DNA mutations. For McGrath, the malignancy formed a tumor on a joint near his upper jaw, directly behind the cheekbone. "It was unbelievable because Tim's whole focus on life was very health oriented, he worked out, he ate healthily," McGrath's mother, Kathy McGrath, said. "He was just a prime example of everything you do right. In a matter of moments, the family's life had been flipped upside down. How would they proceed? How serious was this? Originally, McGrath made plans to have the tumor removed. An ear, nose and throat surgeon would resect the tumor. Chaiyasate was then recommended to do the follow-up reconstruction. But McGrath decided to try alternatives first.

"At that time the surgery sounded horrific, they would have had to cut all the nerves on that side of my mouth, break my jaw in half and remove my zygomatic arch to access the tumor. It was deep within my jaw," he wrote in a recent Facebook post explaining why he decided to explore

other options first. Over the course of 18 months, McGrath tried all sorts of remedies to shrink the tumor. There were supplements, infrared saunas, meditation, therapy, rounds of radiation and a trip to Brazil to meet with a spiritual healer.

The efforts were important to McGrath, who credits them for helping him learn about himself and get in touch with his spiritual side. But they ultimately failed to dissolve the tumor.

By June 2015, the oncesmall bulge on his left cheek had blossomed. The tumor was now overtaking both the inside of his mouth and the outside of his face. His breathing was compromised and he required a tracheostomy and feeding tube

"When the tumor started to expand outside of its confinement, that's when we knew something had to be done,' Kathy McGrath said. Her son's original fear of a radical surgery paled in comparison to the new reality that had taken over. On October 25, 2015, Tim McGrath went in for radical surgery at Henry Ford Hospital. Nine days later, the operation went awry. McGrath's body rejected a skin graft and in response, his carotid artery exploded. While doctors were able to save his life, an open wound, with no nerve function, remained on the left side of McGrath's face. The skeleton was visible, his left eye was gone, his brain was exposed, only protected by a gossamerthin membrane known as the meninges.



Tim McGrath of Sterling Heights practices with his golf simulator in his garage. McGrath's head is being repaired by Dr. Kongkrit Chaiyasate.



JUNFU HAN/DETROIT FREE PRESS Tim McGrath with his parents, Kathy McGrath and Greg McGrath. Tim

McGrath had a tumor that attacked his face and skull.

pomorphic version of the hockey protective gear.

In addition to leaving McGrath susceptible to infection, the condition seemed, for many, irreversible. To fix the problem would require not just the transplant of new skin, but the rerouting of many veins.

For many surgeons, a case this complicated raised red flags.

for his work helping individuals with facial deformities.

'We become doctors for a reason, we want to help people and I subsequently discovered that I have a special gift. I can help people with my hands," Chaiyasate, the father of four, said. He noted that plastic surgery often gets lumped in with more superficial procedures, like Botox injections, but also have the opportunity to transform lives.

"Many of my patients were told things could not be done for them, so I have a responsibility when I look at a patient who comes to me hopeless," Chaiyasate said. "Should I be another one that says, 'I can't do it. It's not my problem' or, should I take on a difficult case and try to help them?"

McGrath's case was as complex as they come; Chaiyasate, however, knew he had to take on. "If not me, then who?" he thought to himself.

In May 2016, McGrath underwent his first surgery with Chaivasate.

There were four more before McGrath's open wound was fully closed and the doctor felt confident sending him out on the rink. Since then, there were three more with the last surgery in April, at which point Chaiyasate was able to remove McGrath's tracheostomy.

A feeding tube is still in place since a portion of McGrath's mouth remains blocked. Because of this, he also struggles to speak, relying on written communication to get his thoughts out. Chaiyasate, however, believes that with consistent speech therapy, McGrath should be able to verbalize his thoughts more clearly again. The doctor also is recommending McGrath take a year off of surgery to let his body recuperate and adjust. The surgeries used tissue from different parts of McGrath's body - such as his thighs, forearm and forehead - and Chaiyasate wants the tissue to settle.

"Many of my patients were told things could not be done for them, so I have a responsibility when I look at a patient who comes to me hopeless." KONGKRIT CHAIYASATE, Beaumont Hospital plastic surgeon

sate said. "We accomplished our first goal and closed the open wound. He can now go ice skating and enjoy life."

It's news McGrath and his family had been waiting on for years.

"There was a time where Tim did not see himself as having a future, and gratefully he is at a time in his life where he is planning for his future,' Kathy McGrath said, noting that her son is working to build a portable house that he can take on speaking engagements when he regains his speech again.

"We're just so lucky that

He was without his human shield — his skin — the anthro-

Chaiyasate was not one of them.

Born in Thailand, the 42vear-old came to the U.S. in 2000 for general surgery residency at Providence Hospital in Rhode Island.

With nothing but two bags of luggage and \$3,000 that his mother had given him, the doctor said, he came for the American dream. A fastidious artist, who had always been nimble with his fingers, Chaiyasate said he thought about various medical paths, but ultimately realizing he had a gift best aligned with surgery. Narrowing down the surgery field became obvious while Chaiyasate was at Providence and studying under Dr. Ian Jackson, a plastic surgeon known

During his career, he has worked on cases ranging from gunshot wounds to the face, to children with deformed cleft palates. The cases are intricate and often require multiple operations, as has been the case with Charlotte Ponce, a teen patient of Chaiyasate, whose face was disfigured by a raccoon.

While each situation is different, Chaiyasate feels a duty to help bring some normalcy back to the lives of his patients.

"I want to make sure there is no repeated trauma and we don't cause any harm," Chaiyathis amazing surgeon is close to home," she later added.

Time is now being spent thinking about what the future has in store — what can be accomplished.

While skating is off the table for a bit — surgery in February used skin from Tim McGrath's forehead, making it hard to wear a helmet — he is working out at the gym, getting ready to hit the ice again in the fall.

"It felt great to be able to feel the glide of the ice under my feet again," McGrath said in a text, noting he can't wait to do it again soon.





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