

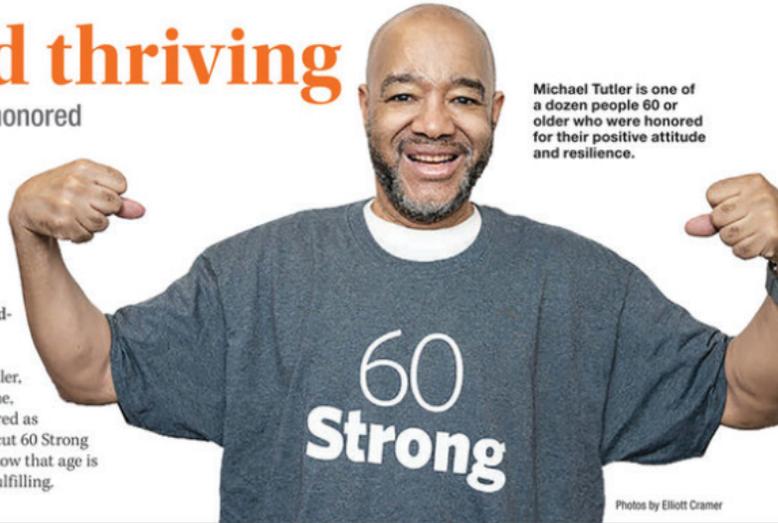
# Over 60 and thriving

Michael Tutler is one of 12 people honored as 60 Strong ambassadors

By Mark Jahne  
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**M**ichael Tutler has overcome significant health challenges in his life. But rather than wallowing in sadness and self pity, he moves forward with a positive attitude.

That's one of the many reasons why Tutler, who lives on the West Hartford/Hartford line, was selected as one of 12 people to be featured as ambassadors on the 2021 Central Connecticut 60 Strong calendar. The intent of this calendar is to show that age is just a number and life after 60 can still be fulfilling.



Michael Tutler is one of a dozen people 60 or older who were honored for their positive attitude and resilience.

Photos by Elliott Cramer



Tutler enjoys attending Hartford Yard Goats minor league baseball games.

Photos by Elliott Cramer

Tutler was diagnosed with congestive heart failure in 2007 and wasn't sure if he would survive. He reached end-stage heart failure and anxiously waited 46 days on the transplant list for a new heart.

He will never forget the moment when he was awoken by his doctors in the hospital, where he was hooked up to an LVAD machine, and was told that he had a match. His donor was a man from Bristol, and Tutler was able to connect to his donor's family on Christmas Eve that year.

Through Donate Life, he serves as a mentor to people awaiting transplants. He visits them in the hospital to provide comfort, give strength and let them know that everything will be OK. He also cares for his 79-year-old mother and helps with cleaning, running errands and driving her to doctor's appointments.

"I go there, like, every other

day," he said.

Congestive heart failure is not the only health challenge he has faced. In 1972 he was hit by a car that fractured his skull. He has suffered from viral meningitis and shingles. In 2011, Tutler was diagnosed with leukemia. He feels blessed that it was caught early and six years later went into remission.

He follows a strict diet and exercises every other day, doing push-ups, cycling and lifting weights at his gym. Tutler has traveled to Wisconsin and Pennsylvania for the Transplant Games and won medals in bowling. He loves photography and sharing his story with those in need of a transplant.

He attributes his survival and positive attitude to a strong sense of faith.

"God has helped me overcome a lot of illnesses ... just about all of my illnesses were near-death experiences," he said. "It's just a blessing to be alive."

He was surprised to be nominated for the 60 Strong program.

"It's an honor. When I first received an email I thought it was a joke or a scam," Tutler said.

He had to stop in-person mentoring of transplant patients because of the pandemic and also suspended his visits to the hospital to thank the nurses who so skillfully cared for him.

Dr. Sarit Patel is an ophthalmologist and chairman of the executive board of Starling Physicians. He said he admires people like Tutler who have been through so much and still thrive in a positive way, especially when they have every reason to be depressed or negative.

"Starling wanted to really celebrate those patients who showed the ability to survive and thrive. He really is a walking miracle and he shows a level of resilience that is just amazing," Patel said.

"The first time I met him was over Zoom. Your whole mood changes because of his positive energy. We can learn a lot from it."

The 60 Strong initiative is designed to be a public service

program. Proceeds from the sales of these calendars will benefit Foodshare, a nonprofit organization that seeks to end hunger and food insecurity in Hartford and Tolland counties.

The calendar will highlight area events and activities as well as serve as a roadmap to good health. It is sponsored by Starling Physicians in conjunction with Starling Senior Care Advantage, which provides seamless and greater coordination of care for senior citizens. **WHL**

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