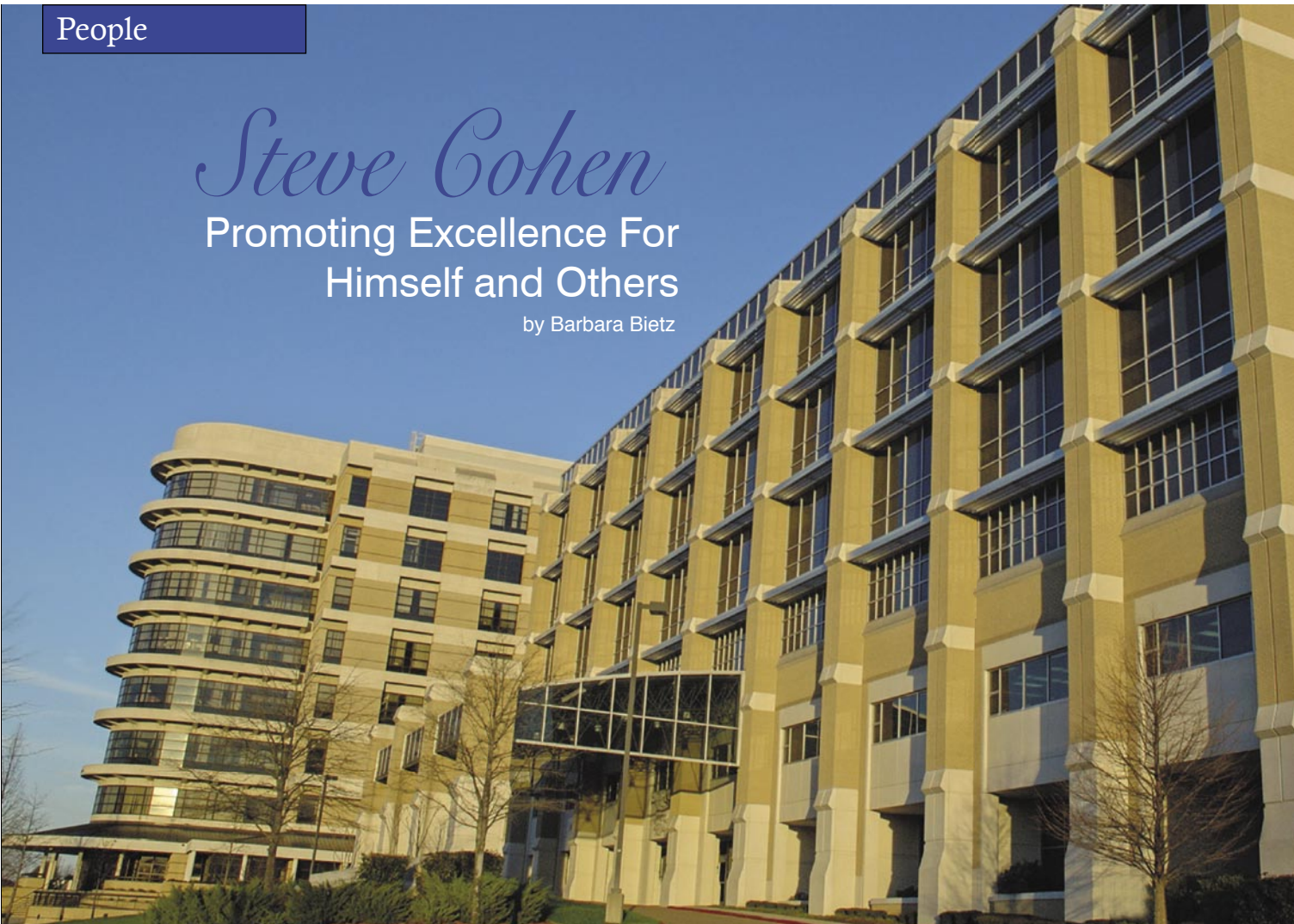


# Steve Cohen

## Promoting Excellence For Himself and Others

by Barbara Bietz



Steve Cohen is a prime example of successful weight loss surgery (WLS). With the help of his surgeons, family and support group, he has lost over 170 pounds. He is delighted with the newfound life his weight loss has provided. No doubt Steve, like many others in the OH community, has achieved a great accomplishment. But what is most notable about Steve's journey is the role he has played as an advocate for his own health care and the well being of other patients.



Steve is the co-leader of a WLS support group at Penrose-St. Francis Hospital in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He says, "I am a very big advocate of the surgery and that's why I spread the word about it. That's what I do. I work a full-time job but I do this at night. Everybody has my cell phone number. They can call me whenever they want and I will take the time to explain [things] to them." Steve believes that an effective support group is nec-

essary for weight loss surgery to be successful. He says unapologetically, "Without support, you will fail."

Steve views the role of the support group as two-fold: to support and educate patients as well as professionals. He says that before the support group got involved at the hospital where he had his surgery, most of the hospital staff was not well informed about weight loss surgery. He believes that surgeons and nurses

need access to information about the experiences of WLS patients. He says, "They don't understand what we go through unless they have had the operation." One example Steve gives is the physical sensation that many patients experience after surgery. He describes it as "pressure, not pain." Steve also offers his views to surgeons. "We told the surgeons that [support groups] should be mandatory." Currently there are upwards of 150 people in the support group that Steve co-leads, and their meetings are free of charge.

Even before his surgery, Steve acted as an advocate for his own care. He visited ObesityHelp.com and read everything he could about the surgery and the hospital he had chosen. While reading posts on the Web site, Steve discovered twenty-six complaints about the hospital. Steve recalls, "The day before I had the surgery I went up to the administrative offices. I went up the secretary and said 'I want to talk to someone very high in this hospital.' She asked why, and I said, 'Tomorrow morning at six a.m. I am walking into this hospital, and three days later I want to walk out.'" The hospital administrators were very open to Steve's recommendations. Steve and other members of his support group continued to make suggestions to the hospital staff. Steve referred hospital administrators to Obesityhelp.com to see what patients were writing about the hospital. When he met with the administrator at a later date, she gave Steve her card and said, "If you have any issues to deal with whatsoever, I want to hear about them immediately."

One of the major changes is a brand new bariatric floor. He says, "The hospital has improved a lot. These guys are making a big effort." When Steve was hospitalized for a hernia, he was already reaping the benefits of the new bariatric wing in the hospital. "The bariatric floor is unbelievable now. They've got beds big enough to hold a horse. They opened an ICU for bariatric patients with nurses who are trained to work with [WLS] patients."

During another hospital stay after his surgery, Steve was not satisfied with the menu he was offered, and ended up eating only potatoes. "They gave me like a pound and a half of potatoes. I can have just a couple teaspoons."

Steve sent a letter to the CEO of the hospital, which was forwarded to the head dietician. She called Steve to see how his ideas could improve the hospital. He says, "We are changing the menus now, too. I will complain only when it's necessary and I will back away from the rest. They really are doing a great job, and

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I tell them so. I tell them when something's wrong, and I tell them when it's good, too."

Perhaps the greatest change that resulted from the support group input was the hiring of -surgical nurse and specialist, Fran Jackson. She is the intermediary person between the support group and the hospital. It is mandatory that all the pre-surgery patients meet with her. Steve praises Fran's work, "She does a great job."

Steve and his support group members have not lost momentum for their cause. They are in the process of putting together a panel to help those who have been denied insurance coverage. They plan to assist individuals who have been denied surgery by writing letters of appeal.

Penrose-St. Francis has become a hospital that Steve is proud to associate with. He praises the doctors and staff of the bariatric department and the care they provide to patients and he is proud to acknowledge that the positive changes that have occurred in the hospital are the result of a group effort and a good hospital willing to listen to their patients. He says, "It's a little bit of everybody's [involvement]. Because of our combined efforts, the hospital is now the recipient of the ASBS Bariatric Surgery Center Award of Excellence." ♥