

'Wild Bill' Minahan Seeking Organ Donations

By KATHERINE SMITH | The Tampa Tribune

Martha Minahan's the opening act.

She stands before the group and introduces her husband Bill.

"I always tell people that 25 years ago, we walked out of the doctor's office with what we thought was a death sentence," **Martha Minahan** said. "But 23 years ago, we walked out of Tampa General with a miracle."

That miracle was a kidney transplant, one the former **Jesuit High** football coach received on March 24, 1986. When **Bill Minahan** speaks to a group of people these days, he whips them into a frenzy, just like he used to do in the **Jesuit** locker room before football games.

Only instead of talking about touchdowns and tackles, **Minahan** speaks of organs and the power of donating them. Imagine Vince Lombardi, Knute Rockne and Mother Theresa rolled into one small body and you have **Bill Minahan**.

He'll celebrate his new passion with a charity luncheon on Friday at the Columbia Restaurant, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. All proceeds go to LifeLink, a non-profit community service organization that promotes and assists in organ donation.

He recently livened up a usually mundane county commission meeting when he was honored and presented a commendation for his work with LifeLink.

"I've been doing this for nearly 30 years and I've never seen anyone like him," said Life Link nurse **Marge Murphy**. "He is the most dynamic cheerleader. He gets into the persona of a coach and riles up the group."

"A lot of people don't understand the importance of organ donation until it touches them personally and when Bill stands before a group and tells his story, he makes it personal to them."

Minahan earned the nickname "**Wild Bill**" for a reason. The former Marine who served in the Korean War first dazzled the area with his athletic exploits as the quarterback for the University of Tampa. He added to his legend when he led **Jesuit** to a state championship in 1968, a first for Hillsborough County, and also when he became the first head football coach in the county to reach the 100-victory mark.

Jesuit's motto is "Men For Others," and **Minahan** lives that creed every day.

His former coaching life mixes with his rebirth on the walls of his home. There are photos from the sidelines of **Jesuit** games, including one where **Minahan** collected his 100th victory.

Then there's his mention in Sports Illustrated, framed next to the four gold medals he won for badminton at the Transplant Games.

The showstopper is an autographed photo of **President Barack Obama**. It includes a handwritten thank you to Martha and Bill for all the work they do in the transplant community.

Minahan almost never got his second chance at life. When he was diagnosed with a kidney ailment and put on

dialysis, he repelled the idea of a transplant. But following a game in 1985 where **Jesuit** was beaten by rival Tampa Catholic, **Minahan** came home and told his wife to put his name on the list.

Before the transplant, **Minahan** spent two years on dialysis, dependent on a machine that robbed him of so much precious time. In his last game as **Jesuit's** head coach on Nov. 22, 1985, the **Tigers** defeated Gaither, 28-21. Four months later, **Minahan** received his new kidney.

Minahan never got the opportunity to meet the family that gave him the gift of another life. He learned his kidney came from a 37-year-old white male who lived in St. Petersburg.

"Somebody we didn't know donated a kidney," **Martha Minahan** said. "In their darkest hour, they were thinking of somebody else."

Minahan celebrated what his wife calls his second birthday on Tuesday. It was 23 years to the day he received his kidney transplant. It's been 24 years since Martha and Bill were married. They met at **Jesuit**, where she once taught and served as the public address announcer for games.

Together, they've traveled the country by car, visiting every Major League Baseball park. They plan to go to New York this summer to see the new Yankee Stadium.

Minahan's convinced without the generosity of a family he never met, none of this would be possible.

"I was given a second chance at life," **Minahan** said, "and I would like to give others that chance."