



# From Open-Heart Surgery to Opening Hearts Nationwide: Pete Johnson's Journey from Delano to National Advocacy

Written by Amy & Pete Johnson

Pete Johnson's journey began during what he thought would be a routine physical at Ridgeview in Delano. His doctor, Dr. Prasana, heard a heart murmur and ordered further testing. That decision saved Pete's life. The tests revealed an aortic aneurysm and an aortic valve disease—two serious conditions that required open-heart surgery in 2017. Instead of letting the experience slow him down, Pete used it as fuel to help others. In 2018, he and his wife Amy founded Rock from the Heart, a nonprofit organization focused on raising awareness about aortic and heart valve disease and supporting patients and families affected by it. What started in Delano has grown into a nationally recognized effort.

Over the years, Rock from the Heart has built partnerships with major healthcare systems like Allina Health, Sanford Health, and Essentia Health. The nonprofit hosts annual educational symposiums, offers free community heart screenings, and has created a strong network of support. Its flagship event—held each February during Heart Month—now serves as the national celebration for Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day (HVDD). In 2025, the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis lit up red and teal in honor of the cause.

The organization has earned official proclamations from the Governors of Minnesota and North Dakota, and from the City of Delano—highlighting the widespread recognition of Pete's work and the importance of raising awareness for heart valve disease. Music has always been central to Pete's life. A professional drummer, he continues to perform as part of Rock from the Heart's unique blend of education and live entertainment. One unforgettable moment was double drumming alongside Rock & Roll Hall of Famer Gina Schock of The Go-Go's—a perfect example of how Pete merges his passion

with purpose. Pete has stayed connected to the Delano community in many ways.

After moving here in 2010, he quickly became part of the local music scene, volunteering with the Delano High School Guitar Club to help students record two studio albums. He still supports them by donating instruments whenever he can. Originally from Minneapolis, Pete lived in Snohomish, Washington, for ten years before moving to Fargo. In 2009, he reconnected with Amy—an old flame—and moved to Delano after they married. The community embraced them, and Delano has been home ever since.

When he's not organizing events or playing music, Pete works for First Student in Orono, where he drives a school bus and coordinates charter operations. He and Amy have five adult children, including three Delano High School graduates: Cameron, Haley, and Bjorn. Pete Johnson's story is one of resilience, action, and heart. What began with a diagnosis during a local checkup has grown into a mission that reaches across the country—but it all started right here in Delano.

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