Dawn Burke believes in the power of prayer and positive thinking. The 59-year-old resident of Keyport starts and ends her day by praying. She also keeps affirmations posted around her home, including her favorite: No matter how you feel, get up, dress up, show up and never give up.

Burke is a patient at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, where she received the gift of life: a right-lung transplant. For years, a chronic cough went undiagnosed until she was told in 2016 that she suffered from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), a disease that causes permanent scarring in the lungs. She was placed on the transplant waiting list in September 2017.

Faith and planning became a part of Burke’s routine on the waitlist. Knowing the importance of being physically fit for surgery, she prepared by attending pulmonary rehabilitation sessions at Monmouth Medical Center twice a week, as well as weekly yoga classes. As Burke had been told, the stronger you go in, the faster you will recover. Almost two years after being placed on the waiting list, Burke received the life-changing call one early morning in June: “We’ve found a donor for you.” That same day, she had received her new lung and was back on the road to her renewed independence.

“I was no longer able to work. Everyday tasks would leave me short of breath,” Burke says. “Although I tried to maintain my independence, it was becoming increasingly difficult to do things on my own.”

Burke can now look forward to resuming her favorite activities in the near future, such as gardening, photography and socializing. Burke is fortunate to have a wide support system. Her son, Darren, flew in from Hawaii to be with her during the surgery. Other family members and friends are now ready to serve as caregivers after her transplant. They call and visit frequently and have helped her with rides, meals and whatever else she might need—and she looks forward to monthly card-game nights with her pals. She also attends a support group.

“Sometimes you feel like you are the only one going through something,” she says. “The group gives me hope and it comforts me to hear their stories. One woman who received a double-lung transplant at Newark Beth Israel has become a mentor and a friend.”

And that support system will only expand when the Transplant Games of America come to New Jersey in 2020, where an expected 12,000-15,000 will assemble to participate in six days of competitive and non-competitive events. As Burke continues to recover, she is looking forward to getting more involved with NJ Sharing Network, sharing her story and encouraging other patients who are waiting. She also has her sights set on visiting her son in Hawaii. “It’s something I’ve been thinking about lately,” she says. “Hopefully I’ll be getting there soon.”