

Waiting with bated breath

■ Riverside students among those who watch live open heart surgery at Cleveland Clinic

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The live lesson wasn't exactly a do-it-yourself kit, but Advanced Placement biology students agreed it was easy enough to follow.

After all, "It was only heart surgery," senior Josh Guzzi deadpanned.

Sixty similar juniors and seniors at Riverside High School, many considering careers in medicine or technology, witnessed a live broadcast of a mitral valve heart repair surgery from 7:30 to 9 a.m. Tuesday.

The procedures took place live at Cleveland Clinic, part of its 2007 Medical Innovation Summit. Young viewers were in good company with more than 900 viewers in attendance at the InterContinental Hotel & Conference Center in Cleveland.

Ten other Northern Ohio schools, including Kenston High School in Bainbridge Township, received either the same broadcast, an aortic surgery broadcast Wednesday, or both.

A surgeon speaking directly to the students explained that Tuesday's patient, a 45-year-old male, had felt quite healthy before the surgery although his heart had begun pumping blood backwards.

Distance learning programs, developed through the Clinic's Office of Civic Education Initiatives, allowed classrooms to submit questions and watch as six to eight robotic arms worked within a 5-centimeter opening in the patient's chest.

Riverside High senior Jesse Lopez, 17, predicted the surgery would give him a better understanding of valves for his class' follow-up labs, including the dissection of sheep and cow hearts. He only felt surprised by the lack of blood and presence of clean, white tissue after surgeons stopped the patient's heartbeat.

"The technology now is amazing," he said. "My grandfather had it a few years ago, and they still did it by cutting the breast plate open."

Josh, who plans to study forensic and crime lab investigation in college, admitted to being more smitten by the technology.

"I was impressed to see them using the arms, minimally invasive. I had expected hands in, rib separation, the whole nine yards."

In fact, most students sat captivated, AP