

More businesses turning to life-saving heart defibrillators

BY JONI HUBBARD
STAFF WRITER
jhubbard@observer.com

The little, black box doesn't look like much, but to the victim of a heart attack, it could mean the difference between life and death.

Automated External Defibrillators, once used only by emergency medical services personnel, have begun to appear in sports arenas, in airports and in places of business, such as Na-

san and Bosch in Farmington Hills. Chicago's O'Hare airport recently garnered national attention, because trained personnel have saved lives using AEDs.

"We're just tickled they have made them so simple to use, anybody can use them," said Kevin Bersche, the Hills fire department emergency services coordinator. "Even though we have tremendous response times, we still can't get people on the scene in time."

How can four or five minutes – the average Hills response time – not be soon enough? According to the American Heart Association, electrical defibrillation is the only effective treatment for the irregular heart rhythm or "ventricular fibrillation" that most often precedes sudden cardiac arrest.

The chances of success in cor-

recting the rhythm decreases by seven to 10 percent each minute, from almost 100 percent within one minute to less than 10 percent in nine minutes.

With the advances in technology, Bersche said, almost anyone can use the AED. A computer chip analyzes the heart's rhythm to determine whether the heart should be defibrillated. Then the machine prompts the user through each step with verbal instructions.

The dramatic improvement in survival rates prompted the fire and police departments, and American Red Cross, to sponsor a corporate breakfast seminar, designed to introduce local business people to the technology and the possibility of training their personnel to use AEDs.

"From a patient-treatment perspective, the more the better," Bersche said of the recruit-

FARMINGTON HILLS

ment program. He is a little concerned that business owners who make the \$3,000 investment in an AED won't see the cost benefit if it isn't used in four to five years. "That's precisely what we hope happens," Bersche said, "but the reality is, if someone's in cardiac arrest, their survival depends on having an AED near them."

Jeff Yakima, corporate security and safety supervisor for Nissan Technical Center in Farmington Hills, said that's exactly why his company decided to buy the system in the fall of 1997. Though it hasn't been used, he said, knowing the AED is there and people have been trained to use it provides an added measure of safety and security to the work environment.

Last fall, the state Legislature passed a law relieving civil liability from non-medical personnel who administer cardio-pulmonary resuscitation or use an AED, except in cases of gross negligence or willful misconduct. Even before the "Good Samaritan" law was enacted, Yakima said, Nissan officials saw the benefits of having an AED outweighed the risks.

"The cost compared to saving somebody's life ... that didn't even enter into our decision-making process," he said. "We really didn't see any down side. It was just the right thing to do."

For more information about automatic external defibrillators and corporate programs, call Bersche at (248) 426-4400.

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she started breathing again, I went, 'Hmmm...'

As quickly as she came back, however, Rebb went out again. Parsons continued his rescue efforts until a crew arrived from Fire Station No. 5. Gary Delp, Rochelle Hall, George Baker and Don St. Clair used advanced life support techniques, then trans-

ported Rebb to Botsford Hospital. She was later transferred to Providence Hospital, where she was treated and released just a few days later.

When Parsons returned to his car, he found a message waiting on his mobile data terminal. As it turned out, Helen Rebb wasn't just any heart attack victim. She was the mother of Sgt. Joseph

Rebb, who worked in the Hills Dispatch Center.

"They called me to dispatch right away, and said 'We've got a medical at your mother's house,'" Sgt. Rebb said. "I asked what it was, and they said they were doing CPR."

While he understood the gravity of the situation, the veteran officer also knew his mother

couldn't be in better hands. Hills rescue personnel are trained in advanced life support techniques.

He also understood, while he'd never had occasion to do the same thing, that saving lives is all in a day's work for a police officer.

"You don't want to beat it to death," Sgt. Rebb said. "I think he knows we appreciate it. We probably think more of it than he does."

Parsons nodded in agreement. "I was just one person on a team working on her at the time," he pointed out.

Mrs. Rebb took Parsons, Delp, Hall, Baker and St. Clair out to breakfast a few weeks after the incident. By then, she'd had a tiny defibrillator implanted in her chest, which shocks her heart when its rhythm is off.

She still doesn't remember much about the day her heart stopped. Having passed the one-year anniversary of her brush with death, she doesn't even remember what she said to Officer Parsons when the two finally got together afterwards.

As they stood side by side again this week, Rebb looked up at Parsons and asked if he knew.

"I think you thanked me a few times," he said with a smile.

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