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Working to keep the beat

September 9, 2009



From left, Laura Belford, Will Nash, Mikey Network co-founder Hugh Heron, Mike Fuller and Mortey Henkle, also of the network, are all passionate about the importance of having defibrillators in arenas and schools.

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By Katie Strachan  
The Oshawa Express

It was the summer of 2002 and Mike Salem was out doing what he loved - playing golf with a bunch of buddies in Muskoka when the unthinkable happened. After hitting his first shot off the tee, the 52-year-old suddenly went into cardiac arrest.

There was no defibrillator at the golf course.

Salem died tragically, leaving behind a legacy his friends and partners would later build on.



Mortey Henkle of the Mikey Network gives Laura Belford some pointers on using a defibrillator.

The Mikey Network, a major lifesaving initiative, was established in 2005 in memory of Salem.

"His death was a terrible shock to all of us and we felt we should honour Mike's life by giving people a second chance at life, something he didn't have," says Hugh Heron, co-founder and chairman of the Mikey Network. The non-profit organization is working to create public awareness and provide education about heart healthy lifestyles, just as they recently did at the Oshawa Municipal Airport.

Durham Radio recently partnered with the Mikey Network to implement three portable defibrillators in the radio stations' corporate vehicles. "We hope we don't ever have to use it, but in the event there is a need to, then we can use its life saving power," says Doug Kirk, president of Durham Radio.

Three employees of Durham Radio, who drive the vehicles, were recently trained to use the public access defibrillators. Laura Belford, Mike Fuller and Will Nash showed off their newly acquired skills at a recent conference.

"This brings the benefit of Mikey to the community. We're at hundreds of community events each year," explains Kirk. For Heron, seeing another life-saving device come to fruition is wonderful. "It's great, but it's not enough. What we would like to do is install (defibrillators) wherever there are fire extinguishers," he says. "Defib technology is amazing and access to these are far more important than you think."

Morty Henkle, executive director of the Mikey Network, couldn't agree more. "I'll guarantee that these mobile units will have a call," says Henkle. Six-thousand-five hundred people in Ontario, both young and old, have an incident of cardiac arrest. More than half of those incidents will be in public places, says Heron. With a defibrillator present, the chance of death could be cut in half, he says.

The portable defibrillators in Durham Radio vehicles are voice activated, telling you what to do. They are very easy to use, says Nash who is trained to use one. "They teach you to pump to the beat of 'Staying Alive' by the Bee Gees," he says smiling. A defibrillator can offer a cardiac arrest victim a lifesaving shock even before emergency personnel can arrive.

So far, 700 defibrillators have been installed in public places across the GTA, says the executive director. Iroquois Park, the Durham Regional Police Marine Unit, the Oshawa Senior Citizens Centres, GO trains and the Whitby Public Library are just a few places where these machines have been installed locally. All Toronto schools, fire services, libraries and arenas house defibrillators, says Heron.

The Mikey Network has also raised more than \$1.5 million since its inception, which makes implementing the live-saving devices possible. "A number of Mikey defibs have already saved lives and the number of survivors is growing," adds Heron.