

AED Survivor's Club Has History of Recovery



Vai and Lou Amici, left, of the Village Santo Domingo, thank, from center to right, Mike Garvin, Jerry Williams and Frank Ellard all of the Village Santo Domingo, for using an AED to save Lou's life on Nov. 4, 2015, at the Brownwood Care Center.

George Horsford | Daily Sun

The number of neighborhoods in The Villages that have AEDs has dramatically increased in seven months, according to the District Public Safety Department.

By **LURVIN FERNANDEZ**
Daily Sun Staff Writer

THE VILLAGES

Mike Garvin, Jerry Williams and Lou Amici are all members of a club they never intended to join.

In 2001, Garvin's heart stopped beating at the wellness center in the Sharon L. Morse Medical building. Last year in May, Williams collapsed

at LaGuardia Airport in New York. And later in November, Amici went lifeless in his chair at home.

All of them were revived by automated external defibrillators, also known as AEDs. The three Village Santiago men have dubbed themselves the AED Survivor's Club.

Their stories of revival and recovery are becoming more frequent with the rising popularity of the portable defibrillators, in The Villages and across the nation.

Already, the program here is partly responsible for the community's recovery rate from sudden heart attack, which is at least five times the national average.

As of Friday, 178 neighborhoods in The Villages have AEDs and 4,000 people capable of using them are registered with the District Public Safety Department, said Lt. John Longacre, who

THE NOTIFICATION PROCESS FOR AED NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS:

- » A 9-1-1 dispatcher determines if the call is a non-breathing incident and alerts first responders.
- » A second alert in the form of a text or automatic phone call is sent to all members of the AED neighborhood group containing the person's address.

Please See **AED, A15**

Continued from A1

oversees the groups.

That's a 6 percent increase in neighborhood groups and 8 percent increase in number of responders in just seven months.

"It's a wonderful program and I'm just glad that people that people in The Villages are willing to part of it," Longacre said.

In emergency situations, civilian responders are essential in the "chain of survival," he added.

As the first link in the chain, they are the first to arrive and begin CPR, which is a combination of chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth breathing, and use an AED, which delivers an electrical shock to the heart.

These techniques keep blood flowing through the heart and to the brain, which is essential to prevent death, and those skills also can revive someone who is in cardiac arrest before emergency workers and the hospitals take over.

In Amici's case, the quick action of Baker's Dozen AED group of the Village Santiago paved the way for a full mental recovery three days later, and helped him regain about 80 percent of his strength since then.

"First thing you want to do is cry because you're so embedded that there's no way you can repay them," Amici said.

The repayment is seeing him alive.

"I still smile when I look at him," said Frank Ellard, former EMT who performed CPR on Amici. "We've only saved one life, but it was worth it."

Sudden cardiac arrest strikes more than 300,000 people in the United States a year, making it one of the leading causes of death. The American Red Cross estimates that greater access to AEDs and training to use them could save 50,000 people across the nation annually.

In The Villages, resident commitment to emergency response training is helping the community surpass national expectations.

Average response time to 911 emergency calls in the nation is 8 to 12 minutes, according to the American Red Cross. The District Public Safety Department's average response time to a call is about 4 minutes, Longacre said. Resident responders often arrive in a little more than a minute.

As for how many lives are saved, the national average ranges from 6 to 8 percent. In The Villages, it's 41 percent.

Still, the number of AEDs and responders covers a small

percent of the community, Williams said. The Survivor's Club mission now is to bring that up to 100 percent.

Garvin is meeting with different neighborhood groups to convince them the program is worth every penny.

"I feel like I was passed up because I should be doing some good and helping other people," Garvin said. "It's the reason I'm here."

Surviving a sudden heart attack has inspired him, he said.

"Once you have that experience, your whole outlook on life changes because suddenly you really, truly realize your mortality," Garvin said. "When you get a second chance, things you didn't think were that important become much more important. Relationships and helping other people — to me right now, helping other people makes me feel good."

CARDIAC ARREST FACTS:

- » Average response time to 9-1-1 calls in the U.S. is 8 to 12 minutes. The District Public Safety Department's average response time to a call is about 4 minutes. Resident responders can get there in 1 1/2 minutes.
- » Recovery rates in the U.S. for cardiac arrest calls range, on average, from 6 percent to 8 percent. In The Villages, that rate for the District Public Safety Department is about 41 percent.
- » There are 178 neighborhoods who have implemented the program, and about 4,000 responders.
- » In April there were 168 AED groups and 3,700 responders, marking a nearly 6 percent increase in groups and an 8 percent increase in number of responders seven months.