

Rescue Squad's New Defibrillator Saves 1st Life

By JENNIFER THOMAS DADE
Enterprise Staff Writer

St. Mary's volunteer rescue and fire departments have long had a reputation for dedication and they are continuing to make strides in improving the quality of the emergency care they provide.

One of the most exciting things going on in the emergency health field here is the purchase this summer of an automatic external defibrillator that helps emergency workers restore a heartbeat in a patient whose heart has stopped. And according to paramedic Kerry Klear, the \$7,000 machine paid for itself on Oct. 24.

That was the Sunday afternoon when 46-year-old Michael Chauncey was playing golf at Breton Bay golf course in Leonardtown. The quality control specialist from Jacksonville, Fla., who had a history of mild heart problems, was in St. Mary's on temporary assigned duty as a civil servant with the F-18 program. He was in the sandtrap at the 13th hole when he collapsed from a heart attack.

The automatic defibrillator had been used in St. Mary's twice before, Klear said, but both times the patients' hearts had been still too long to be revived. If Chauncey had to have a heart attack, the conditions were in his favor.

His golfing partner began CPR immediately and someone nearby ran to call 911. Within 90 seconds an emergency worker was on the scene and the automatic defibrillator arrived within eight minutes. Shock was applied, and Chauncey regained consciousness in the back of the ambulance on the way to the hospital "looking as healthy as you or I," Klear said.

The county has long had defibrillators, which pass an electrical shock through the body to restore life-sustaining electrical rhythms in the heart, said Marie Warner-Crosson, regional administrator for the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services System. What is new, she said, is that they are now automatic instead of manual. The machine does all the work and a rescue worker can use it with a minimal amount of training.

"Now it takes an evening or two instead of a year's worth of training," Warner-Crosson said. "So an (emergency medical technician) can use it, they don't have to wait for a

paramedic." Training is cheaper and quicker.

The automated device tells the emergency worker when to charge, when to stand clear, when to shock. It has a microcomputer that interprets what needs to be done and does everything the paramedic can do, Klear said, only quicker.

There are only about a half dozen counties in the state that have automatic defibrillators and soon every rescue squad in the county will have one.

The county had offered to fund one machine a year, Klear said, but the rescue squads decided to raise the money on their own to get them quicker.

"We work on a tight budget," Klear said, "so we went to the community and asked for help to fund the program."

The American Heart Association calls early defibrillation a link in the chain of survival. For the best emergency cardiac care, all the links should be in place and working properly, as they were in Chauncey's case.

The first link is early access, Klear explained. Someone recognizes there is a problem and calls 911. Equally crucial are the following links: early CPR and defibrillation followed by an advanced life support cardiac unit that can be there in minutes to follow up with necessary treatment.

St. Mary's County's emergency rescue personnel are taking steps to strengthen all of the links in this chain, in addition to defibrillation.

Also soon to be implemented in all rescue squads is the rapid responder program already in place in a few squads, designed to get emergency personnel to the scene as quickly as possible.

This means assigning various senior rescue workers to be on call, equipped with all the equipment they need, according to their level of training. When the call goes out, the volunteer goes directly to the scene, instead of having to go the squad house first.

Also soon to be in place is a policy that would strengthen that final link in the chain, follow-up by the medic unit.

"Before we had everything we needed for the paramedics to work efficiently except the medications needed to back up the shock," Klear said. "The shock will bring a patient back, but it's important to get them the proper meds immediately after that."

As early as next month select first-line responders will be allowed to carry drugs



Heart attack victim Michael Chauncey's life was saved by volunteer and a piece of high-tech machinery new to St. Mary's County. Visiting Chauncey in the hospital were members of the Leonardtown rescue squad. From left are Frankie Bussler, Charles Breck, Cliff Sinopoli, Donna Whites, Gail Harding, Dennis Woodburn and Kerry Klear.

to treat cardiac patients under the supervision and approval of Dr. J. Patrick Jarboe, Klear said.

"The stronger each link gets, the better your chances are," Klear said. "Many people don't realize they are part of the link" by recognizing an emergency and calling 911, and initiating CPR.

As for Chauncey, he is back home in Jacksonville recovering from a quadruple bypass. Prior to his heart

attack, he said, he'd had some mild angina and blockage, and had been advised to quit smoking and watch his diet, neither of which he did.

He's ready to make some lifestyle changes now, he said.

"I hope God blesses each and every one" of the rescue workers that came to his aid, Chauncey said. "They are some of the most dedicated people I've ever seen, and they've got my praises. I can't thank them enough."

Special Delivery

A helping hand can ease the problems of scheduling ongoing cancer treatment for patients and their families. Chesapeake Regional Cancer Center provides patients free door-to-door transportation, along with a friendly smile and a promise that your travel will be comfortable, safe and prompt.

East access to centrally located, leading edge cancer treatment is just part of our special delivery of cancer care

FREE TRANSPORTATION

just one more caring service from ...

CHESAPEAKE REGIONAL

ACUPUNCTURE CENTER OF ST. MARY'S

AN ANCIENT APPROACH TO HEALING FOR THE HEALTH CONCERNS OF TODAY

DO YOU SUFFER FROM

- ★ FMS
- ★ STRESS
- ★ HEADACHES
- ★ PAIN
- ★ LOW ENERGY
- ★ ASTHMA

"ACUPUNCTURE CAN HELP YOU"