

Quick thinking, easy-to-use defibrillator saves Nobleton man at arena

By Mark Pavilons

A Nobleton man has a very big reason to enjoy the holidays this year — he's alive!

Earl Keen, 56, suffered cardiac arrest during a hockey game at the Nobleton Arena Dec. 8. He's alive thanks to the quick actions of his teammates and a public automated external defibrillator (AED).

"I'm alive, and that's a good thing," he said from his hospital bed. The incident "sure does" give him a new perspective and has revealed just how fragile we human beings are.

In perfect health, Keen suffered the attack after getting off the ice and resting on the bench. He said his heart didn't settle down after his shift and he passed out.

His teammates rallied around and everyone pitched in to save him. They used the AED, which also automatically calls EMS.

Andre Delmas was next to Keen and he cried out for someone to call 9-1-1 and his brothers Ron and Brett ran to get the AED in the lobby. Ron said as soon as the AED made contact, it analyzed Keen's condition and shocked him. It later said a second shock was not required. This all happened in under five minutes.

Ray Martin later said it was a combination of quick thinking, the AED and cool heads that saved the day.

Delmas said one of the players — singer Peter Woodhead — began singing "Stayin' Alive" by the Bee Gees as the guys worked to revive Keen. Coincidentally, the beat of that song is recommended when performing CPR.

While in hospital they discovered that Keen had a blockage, and his treatment will likely prevent any further problems.

"The defibrillator saved my life," Keen said.

Keen extended his heart-felt thanks to Ron, Brett and Andre, as well as Bruno Burlon, Ray Martin, Peter Woodhead, and all of the teammates who offered their support. He also extended his thanks to Councillor David Boyd and King Township Fire & Emergency Services for putting AEDs in local arenas.

Delmas stressed the AED "was fantastic" and the directions are clear and concise.

Jim Wall, King's fire chief, praised Keen's teammates who administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and used the AED located in the lobby.

An AED is a portable device that checks the heart rhythm and can send an electric shock to the heart to try to restore a normal rhythm. AEDs are used to treat sudden cardiac arrest, a condition in which the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops beating.

Chief Wall said that the units are extremely easy to use, something that's important when every second counts.

"It just goes to show you that someone with absolutely no training on one of these units can use them to save a life," Wall said.

David Boyd, Nobleton's ward councillor and a firefighter himself, said the unit was placed in the arena about 14 years ago and this was the first time it had ever been used.

"It's amazing that it has been sitting on the wall that long just waiting to be used," he said, noting most AEDs will never be used.

"However, they're worth every cent when you do need them."

Boyd added all the right ingredients came together for a positive outcome in this situation. A facility with an AED is likely the safest place to be during an emergency.

Chief Wall and Boyd were both involved in getting units placed in many public places around the township earlier this year. The initial funding to get units in local arenas was provided by the Mikey Network, an organization dedicated to placing AEDs in as many public locations as possible. It was started by local businessman Hugh Heron (www.mikeynetwork.com).

The Nobleton Lions Club and King resident Lynn Jackson also donated funds earlier this year. Jackson's husband Paul was a full-time training officer for King's fire department who died of a heart attack in 2008.

There are currently 25 AEDs in buildings in King Township, while the fire department has nine units. According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the use of an AED, combined with CPR, can increase the likelihood of survival by 75 per cent or more.

Delmas said the Nobleton Oldtimers are more than a bunch of hockey players. The majority are 50+ and this tight-knit group has a 40-year history in the community.

Delmas attributes the success that night to the group's "maturity" and the fact no one panicked at all.

The group is selective in its membership and they welcomed Keen just a few years ago.

"We've always been about community," said Delmas, who's the former owner of The About Restaurant on Highway 27 (now Sommerhill).

The community did come together that night in the arena. Keen is living proof.