

Defibrillator saved hockey player's life

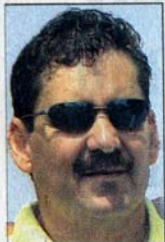
Foundation installing devices in area high schools

BY DAVE DALE
The Nugget

A pulsing aura of appreciation surrounds Michel Lavigne every second his reconstructed heart beats.

"It's so great to be alive," the father of two said Thursday, a simple yet poignant expression of mortal gratitude during a media conference at the North Bay waterfront.

Lavigne, 45, credits a public access defibrillator for saving his life last month after suffering a heart attack at the Sturgeon Falls arena.



Michel Lavigne

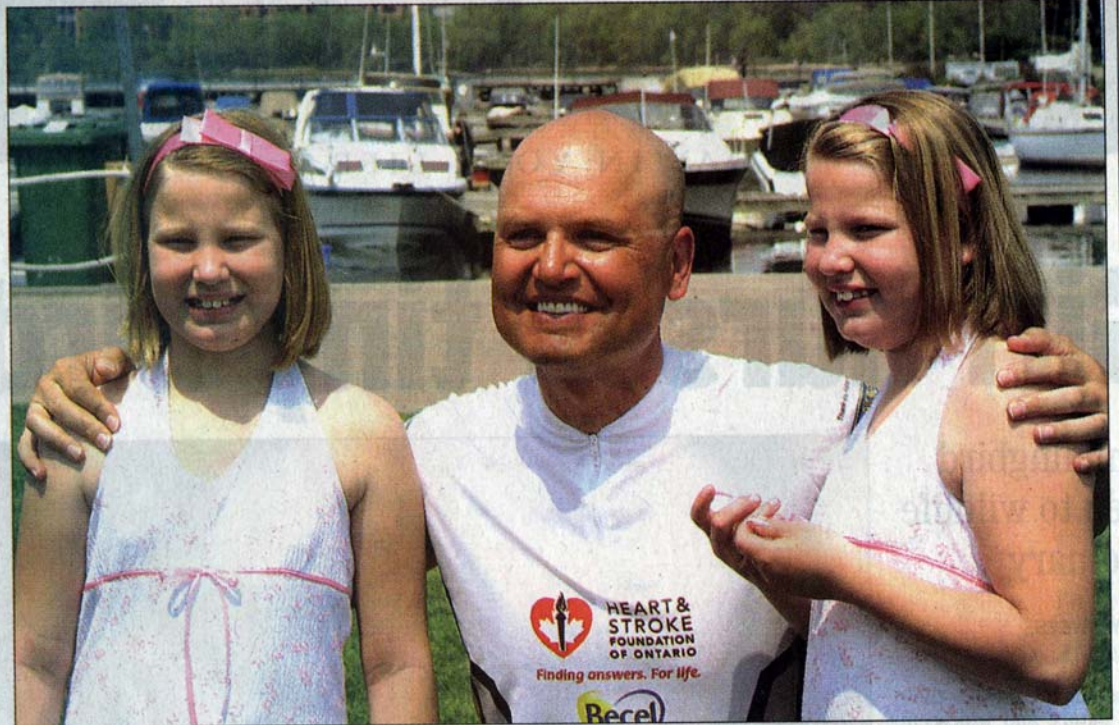
He shared his story to promote a Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario fundraising campaign providing \$22,500 to install five of the computerized medical devices in high schools.

Delivering the funding news was Rocco Rossi, the foundation's chief executive officer, who is nearing the completion of a 22-day cycling trip to benefit the Chase McEachern Tribute Fund.

Chase died at the age of 11 after his heart failed during gym class, not long after the Barrie hockey fan wrote a letter to Don Cherry on Coach's Corner as part of his dream to get defibrillators in every arena in the province.

Chase was motivated by his own heart condition and the heroic actions of a trainer who used a public access defibrillator to save a Detroit Red Wings player, Jiri Fischer, who collapsed on the bench from a similar heart defect.

Among those celebrating the occasion at the Rotary picnic shelter were



Nine-year-old twins Valerie Thomson, left, and Alexis meet Rocco Rossi, chief executive officer of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, Thursday, during a media event at the North Bay waterfront. Valerie has a heart defect and Rossi is cycling between Rainy River and Toronto to raise money for the Heart and Stroke Chase McEachern Tribute Fund to put public access defibrillators in facilities across the province. DAVE DALE, THE NUGGET

representatives of the North Bay Professional Paramedics Association, which spearheads the Lifeline program to make defibrillators available in local public places, the District of Nipissing Social Services Administrative Board, the city and local heart and stroke supporters.

Lavigne almost died April 13 after collapsing at a hockey tournament in Sturgeon Falls, a dramatic and ironic twist considering the event was raising funds to purchase defibrillators for West Nipissing facilities.

Lifeline had already installed one of the Automated External Cardiac Defibrillators at the community centre last fall and bystanders trained in its use

were able to revive him.

Lavigne, who works at the MediChair store in North Bay, is now recovering from a quadruple bypass and learning more about the hereditary heart condition that has claimed six of his mother's siblings.

"Everyone thinks they are invincible," Lavigne said, noting he was in excellent before the attack two shifts into his 75th hockey game this season.

As an active man, "I thought it would never happen . . . but it did," he said.

Glen Arthur, of Arnprior, was also saved by a public access defibrillator last month during a hockey tournament in North Bay, but he couldn't

make the trip to North Bay for the media conference.

Rossi said the five defibrillators for the area will be installed at Algonquin, Widdifield and Odyssee secondary schools in North Bay, Northern in Sturgeon Falls and Nbisning in Nipissing First Nation.

He said the Northern Ontario death rate from cardiovascular disease is 20 per cent higher than the rest of the province and acknowledged the provincial contribution of \$3 million toward developing public access programs in Northern and rural Ontario.

On the web: www.heartandstroke.ca
www.northbay.ambulance.ca