

Life-saving project continues to expand; Defibrillator initiative earns recognition

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The people behind a project that has already saved two lives were recognized Monday for putting public access defibrillators in local arenas and other high-traffic areas in the community.

Jean Guy Belzile, Nipissing District's manager of emergency medical services, along with members of the Lifeline project committee, were honoured by the city during council's regular meeting for their fundraising work to purchase the medical devices installed at public places such as hockey arenas and community centres.

"Two lives have been saved," said Mayor Vic Fedeli, praising the organizers for greatly exceeding their own goal of placing eight of the defibrillators in community centres within the district. "How can you put a price on that?"

The project, which was launched in 2005, is responsible for purchasing and installing 23 defibrillators at various locations across the district - including North Bay City Hall and every arena in Nipissing.

Two of the devices were used this spring within a two-week period to save the lives of two men who collapsed while playing hockey.

Glen Arthur, 55, of Arnprior told The Nugget in April he is certain he would have died had there not been a public access defibrillator and a group of fast-acting bystanders at Pete Palangio Arena when his heart stopped beating during a Big Brothers hockey tournament.

Michel Lavigne, 45, also credits a public access defibrillator for saving his life about a week earlier after he suffered a heart attack at the Sturgeon Falls arena.

"We're very fortunate to have been able to put defibrillators in so many locations in such a short time," said Belzile, praising the North Bay Professional Paramedics Association for supporting the project.

Belzile acknowledged other groups including the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Chase McEachern Tribute Fund for making the project a success here and in other communities across Ontario.

Belzile said organizers continue to expand the program, with plans underway to install another dozen or so defibrillators in the district, including in local schools.

He said it's become a little easier to purchase the devices now that the program has been established.

Belzile said the initial cost for each defibrillator was approximately \$8,000, including purchase, installation, marketing and training. But Belzile said the costs are now about \$2,600 because marketing and training expenses aren't as high.

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a lifeline

The goal of the Lifeline: Every Minute is a Lifetime project is to place public access defibrillators in community centres across Nipissing District, including those in North Bay, Astorville, Temagami, Mattawa, Sturgeon Falls and Verner.

- The program has placed 23 of the medical devices in various locations including all eight arenas in the district, North Bay City Hall, Laurentian Ski Hill and North Bay YMCA.

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