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Flayers save teammate at rink



By GORD YOUNG, The Nugget
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Hockey players in North Bay used a defibrillator to save the life of a teammate twice last month in separate incidents just two weeks apart.

The latest incident occurred Jan. 24 during a North Bay Labatt's Mercantile Oldtimers Hockey League game at the West Ferris Arena.

Bill Copeman, 58, was on the bench when he suddenly collapsed and had to be revived by his teammates with CPR and an automated external defibrillator machine.

Copeman is now recovering at a Sudbury hospital thanks to the presence of a defibrillator at the arena and the fast actions of his teammates Todd Shortt, Cameron Merry and Brent Tremblay, who put the device to use.

Tremblay was watching the play from the bench with Copeman when he looked over and saw that his teammate had dropped to his knees.

"I started screaming, 'emergency,'" said Tremblay, who quickly rushed over to Copeman's aid.

About 25 other players also hurried over to the bench, where Tremblay and Shortt had lifted Copeman and were pulling off his equipment.

Meanwhile, Merry, aware Copeman had suffered a heart attack while playing hockey a year ago, was already returning with the defibrillator from the arena lobby.

"These machines are like godsend," said Shortt, who followed the device's instructions to shock Copeman and to perform compressions.

Merry, who has had defibrillator training as recreation co-ordinator for East Ferris, coached Shortt and Tremblay, who took turns performing CPR until paramedics arrived.

Copeman, who can only remember slumping over, spoke to the three men who saved life Saturday during a telephone conversation from his hospital room, promising to soon rejoin the team even if it's from behind the bench.

He offered his gratitude as the three recounted how the emergency unfolded and praised the community organizations involved in the Lifeline project, responsible for putting defibrillators in arenas and other public places throughout the area.

There are 130 defibrillators installed at public places such as hockey arenas and community centres throughout the district thanks to the North Bay Professional Paramedics Association, the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board and other groups such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation. To date, the devices have been used six times to save a life.

Ironically, Copeman, the league's treasurer, said plans were underway to offer teams defibrillator training only a week before his heart attack.

League president Moe Bedard said the idea of providing such training had been talked about for some time. But he said an incident at Memorial Gardens two weeks prior to Copeman's heart attack set the wheels in motion.

Members of the Thursday Hockey League were on the ice when one of the players lost consciousness on the bench and a defibrillator was used to help save his life.

Family physician Dr. Rick Trenker performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, North Bay Police Service Const. Steve Chabbert administered chest compressions and Bruce Marietti, an acting administrator at St. Joseph-Scollard Hall Catholic Secondary School, operated one of the arena's automated external defibrillators. All three were playing hockey that night.

Bedard said the defibrillator training will take place Feb.11 at 6 p.m. in the board room at Pete Palangio Arena. He said the Mercantile league is asking each of its teams to send three players.

But Bedard said others who are interested in the training are welcome to attend and can contact him at 705-498-0152.

Although, public access defibrillators are designed to be easily operated by bystanders, Bedard said the league agreed its a good idea for each of its teams to have few players who are familiar with the devices.

Grabbing one of the public access defibrillators automatically triggers a 911 medical call. And the machines continually provide audio prompts and instructions while in use.

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