

A potential LifeSaver

Thursday, April 24, 2008

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SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

WEST PATERSON - Influenced by a baseball accident that nearly took a child's life, the West Paterson Boys and Girls Club will place defibrillators at four sites around the borough to ensure heart safety for youngsters and seniors.

"It stemmed from what happened with that kid in Wayne," Thomas Bolen, a Boys and Girls Club executive board member and is also a West Paterson Police detective, said recently. "I think it happens a lot more than people think."

Bolen told the other board members that the organization should look into purchasing defibrillators for the parks in the borough because of the accident that nearly killed then-12-year-old Steven Domalewski of Wayne during a baseball game in his hometown two years ago.

Earlier this year, the Boys and Girls Club executive board approved making the defibrillators available at Frank D. Zaccaria Memorial Park, Memorial Field, the Boys and Girls Club and Diane Grimes Memorial Park.

Bolen said Monday that he ordered the defibrillators two weeks ago from LifeSavers Inc. of Fairfield and was expecting the devices to arrive soon.

Defibrillators administer an electric shock to the heart in order to reestablish normal rhythm. Dr. William Bennett Kouwenhoven invented the defibrillator in 1932 while conducting research at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

On June 6, 2006, Domalewski was pitching in a Police Athletic League baseball game when a line drive hit his chest, which induced a rare condition called commotio cordis. The impact of the ball during the millisecond window between heartbeats stunned the boy's heart.

By the time Domalewski was revived on the field with cardiopulmonary resuscitation and a defibrillator, his brain had been without oxygen for about 15 minutes. He was severely disabled by the injury, has undergone treatment and is recovering.

Calls to the Domalewski family were not returned Wednesday.

Though Domalewski survived, up to 7,000 children annually who suffer sudden heart stoppage do not, according to the American Heart Association.

"The boy in Wayne has raised the eyebrows of everyone in the North Jersey area," said Sam Yodice, president of the West Paterson Boys and Girls Club. "This is an obvious benefit to our children."

Yodice said the biggest challenge for the organization in obtaining the defibrillators, which cost \$1,658 apiece, was finding the money. The board reached out to Councilman Keith Kazmark, chairman of the Borough Council's Recreation and Community Relations committee, who agreed to help find money to pay for the defibrillators.

Ultimately, it was decided that the borough would purchase four defibrillators via a state contract and be reimbursed for the cost of three of the devices.

Two of the three machines, not covered by the borough would be paid for by the club; the remaining one would be paid for by Gabe Giuliani, financial officer for 1225 McBride Ave LLC, a development company.

Joyce Koch, a parent of a five-year-old who plays T-ball for the Boys and Girls Club, said she is happy about the devices being available at the fields.

"Parents and coaches will feel better having these around," she said.

Selena Brogan, a sales representative for LifeSavers, said the company in the last three years has sold 5,000 defibrillator units around the state.

Bolen said he hopes to hold a training session once the defibrillators arrive for coaches and other concerned people. Even without training, it is difficult to accidentally injure others with the machines, Brogan added.

"A lot of people are afraid it can do more harm than good," Brogan said of the defibrillators. "However, the defibrillator will only shock if it detects a heart rate that is shockable."

Joel La Torre, captain of the West Paterson First Aid Squad, agreed that the machines are hard to misuse. He also reaffirmed the importance of having them available in public places.

"It's very good to have them for just-in-case," he said. "You never know what the response time to a scene could be."