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A Life Saving Device

IWU Shirk Center Equipped with a Defibrillator for Cardiac Arrest Emergencies

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--According to the American Heart Association (AHA), over 350,000 people in the United States die each year from cardiac arrest and approximately half of all people who have heart disease die without warning--never having shown any previous symptoms of the disease. Over half of these people could have been saved if Automatic External Defibrillators (AED's)--a medical device designed to give a shock to the heart when it fibrillates or short-circuits--were made available for public use.

On Feb. 19, 1999, the Rev. Harvey Dibrell died of sudden cardiac arrest while exercising at Illinois Wesleyan University's Shirk Center. A long-time friend of John Stutzman '54 and his wife, Erma, of Normal, Dibrell also was an emeritus member of IWU's Board of Trustees.

"Harvey was a particularly close friend of mine," said Stutzman, a retired Bloomington/Normal urologist, "and his death might have been prevented had immediate defibrillation been available."

The circumstances surrounding Dibrell's death made Stutzman aware of the need for an AED at IWU's athletic complex. In memory of his friend, Stutzman presented an AED as a gift to the university.

"The AED, part of IWU's first aid equipment made available to trained employees, will provide a certain level of safety for participants and spectators of sports events at IWU," said Stutzman. The defibrillator weighs approximately five pounds and will be mounted on the wall outside the Fitness Center at IWU's Shirk Center.

"It is definitely important to have a defibrillator in a recreation center, workplace or anywhere that there are people," said Michelle Brown, director of health and safety for the McLean County Branch of the American Red Cross. "Many people even have them in their homes. It really strengthens the chain of survival because you don't have to wait for Emergency Medical Service (EMS) to arrive."

The defibrillator, designed in consultation with the AHA, has improved over the years. It is not only easy-to-use, but an AED is portable, cost-effective, low maintenance and has powerful user-friendly data management and is compatible with other physio-control devices. Easy to operate, public schools, airports and airplanes are being equipped with AED's.

Bill Kauth, IWU's physical education instructor and varsity athletics head athletic trainer, has been trained by the American Red Cross on AED's use. "At IWU, the defibrillator will be primarily operated by myself and our team physician," said Kauth. "In the event of an

emergency, we will use the machine for our students, student athletes, individuals using IWU's athletic and fitness facilities and for fans attending athletic events."

Kauth also holds regular AED and CPR training sessions and has trained IWU's athletic staff and the Shirk Center's student staff on the use of the AED. Recently, Stutzman was a participant at one of Kauth's training AED and CPR sessions.

Recent studies by the AHA show that, in some cases, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is not enough to save a victim and the use of a defibrillator increases the chances for survival. When a person experiences sudden cardiac arrest (approximately 1,000 adults are stricken per day in the U.S.), the heart goes from a normal heartbeat to a quivering rhythm called ventricular fibrillation (VF). VF is fatal unless an electric shock, called defibrillation, is given. CPR does not stop VF. By providing a trickle of oxygen to the brain and heart, CPR keeps these organs alive until defibrillation can shock the heart into a normal rhythm. Defibrillators automatically interpret the victim's heart rhythm and will not deliver a shock unless the reading shows the heart needs a shock.

According to CPR experts, if the technique is started within four minutes of a person's collapse and defibrillation is provided within 10 minutes, a person has a 40 percent chance of survival of sudden cardiac arrest.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-Fla.) and U.S. Sen. Slade Gorton (R-Wash.) have introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate, respectively, the Cardiac Arrest Survival Act. The bill supports the wide use and deployment of AED's and has been endorsed by the AHA.