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May 10, 2007

School nurse honored for saving child's life

AMANDA KEIM, TRIBUNE

In her 27-year career, Cherokee Elementary School nurse Donna Musser never had to restart someone's heart with a defibrillator.

That was until April, when a second-grade student collapsed before class and Musser used the machine to save the boy's life — just two months after the device was donated to the school.

Musser was honored for her quick reaction Tuesday in a ceremony that also thanked the local doctor who donated the defibrillator and recognized the rest of the Scottsdale Unified School District's nurses for National School Nurse Day.

Musser's actions began shortly before school on the morning of April 16. Michael Higgins, 8, had stepped out of his classroom to get something and a parent volunteer saw him collapse on the sidewalk.

Musser arrived on the scene with the defibrillator a few minutes later and found a teacher already performing chest compressions. She attached the defibrillator to Michael's chest, and the device showed that his heart wasn't beating. She shocked his heart backed to beating and continued resuscitation until paramedics arrived.

"Thank God it was here," Musser said. "His chances of making (it) without the device weren't good."

That defibrillator was donated by Himanshu Shukla, founder of Mesa-based Cardiac Arrhythmia Institute. In addition to outfitting each of Scottsdale's 33 schools with the devices, he has donated them to schools in the Paradise Valley, Cave Creek and Mesa school districts in recent months.

Since the school received it, Cherokee's whole staff has been trained in how to use the defibrillator and practiced the procedure to use in case of an emergency, principal Jan Howard said.

When Michael suffered the attack, Howard said everyone jumped into action.

"You know how in your life, you do all these practice drills but never think you're going to need them?" she said. "Later in the day, when it would sink in, we started to talk and actually started to cry."

Both the school and Michael's family knew he had a heart condition before the attack, but it had been hard to diagnose, said Beth Higgins, Michael's mom.

Michael now has a permanent defibrillator in his chest and feels fine, Higgins said. And although he can't play the contact sports he loves anymore, he's going to switch to golf to stay active.

"You have to have faith. He was in the right place at the right time," Higgins said. "He's going to do something great in life."

11:13 pm Tuesday, July 10, 2007



Cherokee Elementary School nurse Donna Musser, left, talks with fellow nurse Beth Troxler from Cochise Elementary School in Scottsdale on Wednesday. Musser was honored for saving the life of an 8-year-old student in April.

Laura Segall, Tribune

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