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Heart-starting device donated to CMU

Mother of cardiac patient says machine may save a life



Photo by Gretel Daugherty—Sue Edson, left, shows a Philips Heartstart portable defibrillator that she presented to Colorado Mesa University Tuesday at the University Center. Edson started the ARVD Heart for Hope non-profit after her own daughter was diagnosed with a heart condition. ARVD stands for arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia. She said she hopes to eventually distribute defibrillators to middle and high schools throughout Mesa County School District 51 to increase the survival rate for victims of sudden cardiac arrest, which claimed the lives of more than 7,000 children under the age of 18 in the United States last year.

By Emily Anderson
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Five years ago, then-21-year-old Lindsey Beechwood Hoffner had a cardiac defibrillator implanted in her chest.

The device prevents her from going into sudden cardiac arrest and has saved her life at least once since she had it implanted shortly after being diagnosed with arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia.

Athletes at Colorado Mesa University will be able to benefit from an external version of Hoffner's device thanks to the donation Tuesday of an Automated External Defibrillator to the university's athletic department. Hoffner's mother, Sue Edson, made the donation through ARVD Heart for Hope, a Grand Junction-based nonprofit Edson started after Hoffner's diagnosis.

Edson said her nonprofit works to get AEDs into schools because the American Heart Association estimates 7,000 people under the age of 18 die of sudden cardiac arrest each year. An AED and CPR combined is the only way to restart a heart during sudden cardiac arrest, which is why Edson wants the devices nearby if a student experiences sudden cardiac arrest at school.

"This enhances their chances of survival," Edson said.

AEDs come in small, portable kits and can shock a person's heart if the device detects sudden cardiac arrest, which means the person's heart has stopped beating due to an abnormal rhythm. Colorado Mesa's athletics department has six of the devices, including the one donated Tuesday.

Josh Fullmer, head athletic trainer at the university, said the school's policy is to have an AED nearby whenever student athletes play a game or have a practice, something recommended by the National Collegiate Athletics Association. So far, he said the school hasn't had to use the AEDs it owns.

Fullmer said having six devices will make it possible to reach that goal with the school's current sports practice and game schedule.

"We purchased the others. They are expensive, so this (donation) helps a lot," Fullmer said.

The device donated Tuesday cost \$1,500. AEDs can range from \$1,500 to \$2,000, according to Edson.