



His heart stopped; they saved him



[Click here to go to the stories from U! section](#)

Tuesday, 17 April 2007

ST. ALBANS – Larry Hetrick, 69, of East Alburgh, met Thursday morning with the women who brought him back to life.

Understandably, emotions were high when Pamela Scott, R.N., and emergency medical technicians Jennifer Mucha and Heather Wright greeted the bearded Hetrick at Northwestern Medical Center (NMC), where he had lain near death March 8. They hugged and smiled and recalled the time like vets having survived the battlefield.

Hetrick is retired from IBM. A veteran of the U.S. Air Force and owner with his wife, Renate, of the Rumblebox furniture store in Alburgh, he had been brought by AmCare ambulance to NMC's emergency department from the Hannaford supermarket in St. Albans Town where heart failure struck him down.

He was seen by the NMC physician on duty, Dr. Louis Dandurand, stabilized, and then sent in an AmCare ambulance to a cardiologist at Fletcher Allen Health Care (FAHC) in Burlington -- Mucha at the wheel and Scott and Wright in the back caring for him.

Ten minutes into the ride, Hetrick's heart stopped. Renate Hetrick went through the ordeal, watching from the front seat of the ambulance, already burdened by a continuing ordeal in which her husband is battling prostate cancer.

When hit by the heart attack, Hetrick eased himself to the floor at Hannaford, then scooted his cell phone across the floor to a woman "who looked surprised," but picked it up and pressed the right buttons to alert 911 and call his wife.

"I started feeling nauseous, dizzy," he said. "All of a sudden my arms went numb ... It was almost an instant freeze, from my shoulders right out to my fingertips. I held them out there, and they were just completely frozen.

"I'm sure my heart stopped then for a few seconds or whatever (while on the floor) and (then) it was just headache and nausea and numb feeling all over."

Hetrick and those who saved his life talked Thursday about terrible hours turned to joy because of the three women, a device called an automated external defibrillator (AED), and a newly developed NMC/FAHC protocol for a specific type of heart attack known as STEMI, an acronym referring to a specific heart rhythm.

The AED is the device that shocks the heart back into action. The American Heart Association is pressing the Vermont Legislature to put money behind a program that would make the device more widely accessible, Nicole M. Lukas, an association representative said at the Thursday meeting.

It's portable, costs about \$2,000 and a layperson with two hours training can use it, she said.

When she got wind of the meeting, she drove from Burlington to spread the word about the campaign and enlist Hetrick's help, as, Wright suggested, a "poster child" for the campaign.

The Messenger, at Hetrick's urging, set up the meeting to get a photo of him with those who had saved his life.

He was among the first 10 patients involved with the new two-hospital protocol, and, perhaps, the first patient under that arrangement to be brought back to life while being transported from a St. Albans hospital to the hospital in Burlington.

Walter Krul, AmCare's director, said he knows for certain that it was the first time, under the special conditions of the new STEMI program, that the patient being transported to Burlington had experienced heart arrest.

"People don't realize the cooperation that exists between the EMS crew and hospitals, and the people up at 2 a.m., for example, taking patients to Burlington – that there's always an NMC doctor here, on the other end of the radio the entire trip," said Krul.

Hetrick certainly understands how important that planning and such lifesaving services can be.

"I felt like there was no more pain. It was all over," Hetrick said, recalling the

Send us your ideas for stories or photographs, or send what you've written or shot with a camera. Even send ideas or videos you've produced yourself. To send at (ie - photos or videos - or questions about sending them) dan@samessenger.com.

Thank you.

Name

*

City/Town:

Daytime Phone #

*

Email Address

Enter your comment here:

* = Required

moments before he suddenly lay unmoving in the speeding ambulance. "I remember saying something to the effect, 'I've hurt as much as I'm going to.' I felt like I was dying."

Hetrick added, "It's hard to put it into words. It wasn't actually words going through my mind, but there were feelings. I had the awareness there was still somebody around me, right before that. And I couldn't tell whether I was talking to them or not."

He said he was aware that someone – Scott, perhaps – "was untangling cords" and that he "felt sorry for her."

As the ambulance flew toward Burlington, this is what took place.

Scott: "I had just assessed him and asked him how his pain was. We use a zero-to-5 scale. And he said, 'Oh, it's much better.' And I said, 'Can you give me a number?' And he said, 'Oh, probably 1.' I had turned around and was looking at the pumps, and I heard him moan, and I turned around, and that's when he had arrested."

And her thoughts? "Oh, my God, he just said he was better!

"We continued to travel while we got the things done that we needed to do," Scott said. "Heather started compressions (on his chest to get the heart going) and I got the defibrillator pads on and when everything was set, we told Jenn (Mucha) to stop."

Mucha pulled the ambulance over at Exit 17, about 10miles from their destination. "I was praying," said Mucha when she was told Hetrick's heart had stopped.

Scott added, "I pressed 'Analyze' on the AED and I shocked him once, (per protocol), and gave him a good jolt, and he came off the bed and at the shock he went into a very slow rhythm, but it was a rhythm, and Heather and I are going, 'Come on! Come on!' And all of a sudden he picked up a very fast rhythm!"

Scott continued: "Things get pressured at that time, because we are still doing our work and you have the hospital – they want their questions answered and their orders done. So it was a very busy ride. And, she added, smiling, "But a very joyful one."

All the while, the crew was in touch with both hospitals. Scott and Wright conferred with Dr. Dandurand at NMC by radio from the time Hetrick came aboard the ambulance at Hannaford, until he was carried by stretcher into Fletcher Allen Health Care.

Hetrick told the Thursday group, "The doctor came over and told my wife, 'It's very dire.' And all of a sudden he got one artery about 20 percent open, and that gave him the ability to make the decision to wait until the morning to do the catheterization and put the stents into the other two arteries."

Renate Hetrick, however, still remembers all the stress and anxiety of that day.

"It felt like an eternity," Renate Hetrick, said of just the couple of minutes it took to get her husband through the doors at the Burlington hospital.

Everything involved had followed a carefully scripted protocol and, what Scott said of the arrival at FAHC could easily apply to everyone at every step of the journey: "They were all prepared."

By Saturday morning when Hetrick regained consciousness, Mucha was there to see how he was. All three women called the hospital at various times to check on him.

Larry Hetrick is grateful for the roles all played, especially to the ambulance crew to whom his life had been entrusted.

"They're what made the difference. What they did was just miraculous. They saved my life and they didn't even know me. I might have been a criminal. They took care of me like I was their own brother. I'm just so grateful," he said.

Hetrick looked about him Thursday while visiting some of his rescuers at the NMC. His smile said, "Thank you."

But he hasn't reached a completely safe shore: he still has his prostate cancer to face.

He will be going through tests this week, perhaps with a new appreciation of the many who will be there to help him further.

802-524-9771 [email](#)
[Terms of Service](#)