Bristol achieves status as a heart safe community

By JUSTIN MUSZYNSKI
STAFF WRITER

BRISTOL — As you're driving through the city it's easy to overlook the signs that say Bristol is a heart safe community.

However, what this designation actually means is something that could save your life one day. In order for a community to earn this status, it must comply with criteria set by the Connecticut Department of Health, which requires a certain amount of automated external defibrillators and people trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation. These numbers are based on a city or town's population.

Mike Orazzi | Staff
Bristol is now a Heart Safe community.

Bristol is required to have 15 AEDs and 75 citizens other than first responders trained in CPR. Sharon Kenney, EMS training manager and Bristol Hospital paramedic, spearheaded the efforts for Bristol to become a heartsafe community, asking local organizations to participate. Bristol finally achieved this status in October.

"I've been doing the legwork all by myself for years," said Kenney.

"We were able to get AEDs out there, and businesses that were willing to participate and train their staffs," said Kenney. "It took a few years pounding the pavement."

AEDs are used in situations of cardiac arrhythmia, which if not cared for right away can lead to cardiac arrest. Kenney said just chest compression can be adequate for the first few minutes of cardiac arrest because a body retains oxygenated blood, but that after the first two minutes a patient should have an AED by their side.

ESPN, the "worldwide leader in sports," also happens to be Bristol's leader in the number of AED's and staff that it has trained. Dan Pivin, ESPN's health and safety manager in global security and safety, said the Bristol headquarters is equipped with 35 defibrillators as well as 12 on-site instructors that have completed American Heart Association training.

"We want to protect our employees, as we have a major workforce," Pivin said. "Our goal is to make sure a defibrillator is always available."

He also said that having them on site helps make the community of Bristol a safer place.

Kenney said that there are about 46 AEDs in Bristol and a whopping 500 citizens that are trained in CPR. She is constantly reaching out to organizations to persuade them to participate, but said it's difficult financially for certain groups.

"It's not really cost prohibitive, but it's still expensive," Kenney said. "It's a difficult economy, and we're asking people to come up with $2,000 or $3,000 for this. But we were able to get what we needed."

Kenney said a typical AED will cost anywhere from $1,500 to $1,800, and the other costs associated is the training also is an expense. She added that the price of an AED now is significantly lower than it has historically been and that they are smaller and easier to use.

Funk Funeral home on Bellevue Avenue recently jumped on the safety train by receiving the necessary training that Kenney provides, and is expecting its defibrillator to arrive in the near future.

Mike Orazzi | Staff
Sharon Kenney at the Bristol Hospital EMS Training Center at 420 North Main Street.

"It's definitely something we support to help Bristol become safer," said Chris Duhaime, managing partner at Funk Funeral Home. "It's really a one-time cost and it's most definitely worth it. We felt it was important to so we can provide people with help should there be some kind of emergency."

Kenney also said that Bristol Hospital is more than supportive of her efforts. If good CPR methods are not in place it cuts down on a patient's chances of survival by 10 percent every minute, she said.

"I can tell you from personal experiences to restore a person's pulse that otherwise wouldn't have survived an event is an amazing feeling," said Kenney.

Although Bristol received this heart safe status, Kenney said her job is not done. Her ultimate goal is to have every school in the city equipped with an AED.

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