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Partnerships, grants help put defibrillators in Thompson School District classrooms

BY CARL MCCUTCHEM • LOVELAND CONNECTION • SEPTEMBER 22, 2009

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Leaders with the McKee Medical Foundation and Thompson School District want to keep hearts beating.

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To do so, McKee secured a grant which helped purchase four automated external defibrillators, or AED, which Richard Perse, founder of Heartsmart, Inc., formally presented to the district and McKee officials Monday morning at Thompson Valley High School.

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Richard Perse, founder/president of Heartsmart, Inc. demonstrates how to use an automatic defibrillator at Thompson Valley High School on Monday. (V. Richard Haro/For Loveland Connection)

September 22, 2009

Partnerships, grants help put defibrillators in Thompson School District classrooms

By Carl McCutchen
Loveland Connection

Leaders with the McKee Medical Foundation and Thompson School District want to keep hearts beating.

To do so, McKee secured a grant which helped purchase four automated external defibrillators, or AED, which Richard Perse, founder of Heartsmart, Inc., formally presented to the district and McKee officials Monday morning at Thompson Valley High School.

The district also received a fifth defibrillator from a partnership between the Kick Start Your Heart Foundation and the Daniel Lunger Memorial Fund.

Although the AEDs had been placed in TSD high schools, including Loveland, Mountain View, Thompson Valley, Berthoud and Harold Ferguson, since the beginning of the year, Perse wanted to ensure there were no lingering questions surrounding the devices, and also wanted to let those involved know how big of a deal it was to be placing the AEDs in the schools.

"We're so happy you folks decided to do this at this district," he told the small crowd. "Having them here has raised safety in the district."

Perse said each AED costs around \$3,000, but comes with all the needed accessories like extra pads and batteries, and even includes training for 10 people.

Because the defibrillators were going to the school district, and being bought by a foundation, Perse said he cut McKee a deal and gave them the four AEDs for only \$9,600.

The other AED was purchased through a program where an entity contributes \$750 toward the

defibrillator and the Kick Start Your Heart Foundation provides the rest of the money.

For TSD, the \$750 was contributed by the Big Thompson Emergency Physicians group.

For Dennis Breitbarth, a Thompson School District board member as well as a member of the McKee Medical Foundation, getting the defibrillators in the schools was a no-brainer.

"I think it is definitely something we need to get more attention to. This is important stuff," he said. "Getting these here and getting the community more aware of it, maybe we'll get more community support for it."

Placing the AEDS in the high schools was the culmination of a lot of work for Barb Hartman, the district's coordinator of health services and also a school nurse. "It's kind of my baby," she said.

Hartman said the project began around two years ago, but took quite awhile to get rolling because money and support had to be found. She felt it was important to get the AEDs within the district because of how active the buildings are.

"It's very important we have the ability," she said. "We have churches, we have athletics, we have so many who use our buildings all the time."

The project also took a long time to come to fruition because Hartman wanted to make sure all of the AEDs were uniform.

"They make a lot of different brands, a lot of different accessories," she said. "They look different. They act different. Some have prompts, some don't."

Training for the AEDs has already started and Hartman said more training opportunities will continue throughout the next few weeks so staff and students will know how to handle the devices.

"The training is in process," she said. "We've completed one training, and the other schools have dates."

The long-term cost of the defibrillators should remain relatively low for the district, Perse said.

He said the AED pads have to be changed every two years whether the device had been used or not, and the battery has to be changed every four years.

A new set of pads costs \$100 and a new battery is \$150.

"It's very minimal," Perse said.

While the AEDs are currently only in the TSD high schools, the opportunity to get them in elementary schools and middle schools might be open in the future.

"It's very important to potentially have them in elementary and middle schools, not only for the kids, but also for the teachers," Breitbarth said. "Sometimes there's a lot of stress in teaching."