

SPD Officers use CPR skills to save local woman's life

Written by Janna Ross

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The officers of the Sellersburg Police Department are continuously attending training workshops and classes to enable them to learn the top of the line techniques for their job related skills. Sellersburg Chief Russ Whelan has never kept the fact that he likes his officers to attend the many different training opportunities a secret.

Therefore when the opportunity for the officers to be re-certified in CPR (Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation) was available he welcomed the opportunity. Certain circumstances leading to the latest training sessions made this re-certification a little more special.

In early December the department received a call regarding an unconscious female. It is not uncommon for a police unit to be dispatched to an ambulance run.

The first person to arrive at the scene was Sellersburg Police Chaplain and Reserve Gary Fenner. Moments later Officer Charles Stirsman also arrived on scene along with Officer Daniel Cotton.

Fenner entered the home first to discover family members administering CPR to an unconscious female. Fenner and Stirsman jumped in to take over the life-saving initiative.

"I got there expecting it to be a church member. We jumped in and took over the CPR. I was giving the breaths and Charlie (Stirsman) was doing compressions," Fenner explained, who is also the Pastor at Calvary Christian Church in Sellersburg. "She was unconscious when we got there. I didn't know who she was until I asked the homeowner when she was on her way to the hospital."

Fenner nor Stirsman, who has been with the Sellersburg Police Department for about six months, could recall exactly how long they administered CPR before EMS arrived.

"It always seems longer when you are actually doing it," Fenner stated. "I do remember looking up and seeing the EMS coming through the door, but we continued until they were ready to take over."

Once the EMS crew was prepared to take over and transport the woman to the hospital, Stirsman and Fenner had the same thoughts.

"Obviously at that moment we both had an adrenaline rush. It took a couple of hours for both of us to come back down from that. You just can't divorce your emotions," Fenner continued. "Our initial thoughts were we did the best we could to help her chance of survival."

A humble Stirsman felt it was just part of his job.

"When we walked out of the house, you just took a breath and went back to the car. Later on I asked the EMS crew and they said we did a great job. I was just glad to hear she had a chance to be ok," Stirsman stated.

A few days after the incident Fenner traveled to the hospital to visit with the woman.

"I went to see her at the hospital after a few days. She was semi-conscious but I was able to see her son," Fenner added.

The woman who was saved by the quick response of her family, Fenner and Stirsman, is the sister to a woman who attends Calvary Christian Church. The tie to Fenner's church family enabled him to receive updates on the woman's progress.

"We just gave her a chance. I was getting updates on her condition. She started breathing on her own and had some brain activity, then when she woke up, that was a thrill, that feeling is really hard to put into words," Fenner said.

Fenner also received a special phone call from the woman's brother.

"Her family is very grateful that there were people there willing, able and ready to respond," Fenner stated. "I also received a phone call from her brother to thank me. Her nephew was there and he was also very grateful." The woman's brother called Fenner from his home state of

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Missouri.

Fenner took a moment to gather his thoughts before he answered the question how it felt to help save someone's life.

"It's something very special to me. After the EMS crew left with her we still wasn't sure she would live. Most of those who you perform CPR on do not survive. I've heard like 25 percent of those who receive CPR do not live, but I seem to think that may be even lower. As the Chaplain I have also been on the side where the person does not live."

Fenner continued, "You just don't know. It maybe your family member or loved one that you've saved their lives. How would they feel if they watched a loved one having a heart attack and not know what to do? To perform CPR and see a person live, it's a wonderful experience to help someone."

Fenner also gave the latest update on the woman.

"She will have to have some surgery to repair a heart valve that they think caused it and she has some short-term memory loss, but overall she is doing really well. She was sent to a rehab hospital and then released home. Her heart definitely stopped and to come back from that and be at home doing what she is doing, that is just remarkable," Fenner concluded.

Fenner's daughter-in-law, Diane, is the one who re-certified the 15 officers of the Sellersburg Police Department and a couple of their Reserve Officers.

"The re-certification was not mandatory for the Reserves but it was mandatory for all full-time officers," Whelan stated. "Gary contacted me after the incident in December and asked about getting everyone re-certified and I thought it was a great idea. He said his daughter-in-law had offered to come in and teach the class," Whelan said. "The classes went well."

The classes the officers recently attended to be re-certified were held on Monday, February 23 and Thursday, February 26. Half of the officers received the training per day.

Whelan concluded with what he was told about Stirman and Fenner's quick response, "What I was told was they were accredited with saving the ladies life."

Fenner is reaching out to the community to anyone who wishes to become certified in CPR. Diane Fenner, who is a certified instructor through the American Red Cross, will again teach the CPR class at the church. She taught the class several years ago at the church.

Fenner has scheduled the CPR class for March 14 and 15. The class is open to the public.

"The public can take the class for about \$20. All you have to pay for is the materials, there's a book and you have to pay for your certification card. They just need to call us so we can be sure to have enough materials ordered," Fenner concluded.

If you would like to attend the CPR certification class at Calvary Christian Church, located at 605 Norman Drive in Sellersburg, please pre-register by contacting the church office at 246-4383.