



City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

FIRE DEPARTMENT

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Firefighters Reunited with Heart Patient Survivor

Harrisonburg, VA. – Firefighters with the Harrisonburg Fire Department (HFD) were recently reunited with a patient who collapsed and unexpectedly suffered heart trauma.

On Wednesday, January 25, a call for service was received around 10:20 a.m. for the report of an unresponsive patient in an apartment complex gym on Sunchase Drive. The patient had been running on the treadmill and suddenly collapsed.

Upon arrival, first responders found the 19-year-old female in cardiac arrest. A medic was then requested and additional resources immediately responded. There are different levels of training and expertise for emergency medical personnel and a medic can administer advanced medication and perform advanced procedures in the field, outside of the hospital setting.

Crews continued their advanced lifesaving measures for approximately 50 minutes. CPR was conducted and an automated external defibrillator (AED) was used twice. The patient was eventually transported in critical condition to Sentara RMH Medical Center, where she underwent a series of tests.

“Conducting CPR can save someone’s life,” explained Captain Paul Helmuth, safety, wellness, and emergency medical services (EMS) officer with HFD. “We encourage the public to be aware of the signs and symptoms of heart failure and to take a basic course that teaches CPR. It takes approximately five minutes for a first responder to arrive to a patient and the earlier CPR is started, the better the chances of survival.”

The quick actions of those in the gym with the patient, who immediately called 9-1-1, along with the continued CPR by HFD staff, are credited for saving this patient’s life.

“Early CPR is crucial to survival and retention of neurological function,” explained Sentara RMH Medical Center Emergency Department Physician Nazir Adam, MD.

After an almost complete recovery, Cayla Digiovanni, the survivor, stopped in HFD’s Station 3 to meet with the firefighters, who responded when she collapsed.

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“It is an overwhelming feeling to meet the people who worked together to save my life,” explained Cayla Digiovanni. “I hope people who hear my story are motivated to take CPR because you never know when you could impact the lives of others.”

According to the American Heart Association, each year more than 350,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occur in the United States. Statistics prove that if more people knew CPR, more lives could be saved. Hands-only CPR can save a life in two steps; call 9-1-1 and push hard and fast on the center of the person’s chest.

For additional information and safety tips, visit www.HarrisonburgVA.gov/fire. To learn about CPR classes nearest to you visit, www.heart.org.



Pictured above (left to right): EMS Training Officer Travis Karicofe, Captain Paul Helmuth, Firefighter Tyler Clark, Cayla Digiovanni, Firefighter Luke Walker, Master Firefighter Glenn Beathe, Firefighter Wes Meadows, and Master Firefighter Daren Showalter.

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