

GOOD SAMARITANS ABOUND



PAUL BLAKE, a mechanic at Thompson Mailing Corp. and EMT captain of the Hobbie Ambulance, holds an automatic defibrillator at the South Centre Township plant. He used the device recently to save the life of a co-worker who collapsed. *Press Enterprise/Jimmy May*

Co-worker saves man at South Centre plant

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SOUTH CENTRE TWP. — Half an hour before his shift at Thompson Mailing Corp. was supposed to end Wednesday, Dave Litwhiler collapsed.

He wasn't breathing and he had no pulse.

But thanks to some alert co-workers, plus the company's earlier decision to buy an automatic defibrillator, Litwhiler survived.

"If nothing else comes out of this, make sure people know that wherever you have people gathered, you should have a defibrillator," said Paul Blake, one of the employees who saved Litwhiler's life. "It does work."

Litwhiler is expected to return home from the hospital early next week.

'Turned blue'

Wednesday afternoon's drama began calmly enough, said Joan Thompson, co-owner of the company. Something had gone wrong with one of the inserting machines that Thompson's, which sends out mass mailings, uses to stuff envelopes.

Litwhiler, one of the company's eight mechanics and a 10-year veteran of the firm, went with his wrench and

screwdriver to fix the problem around 3 p.m.

"Then he just dropped straight down," Thompson said. "His eyes rolled back, and he turned blue."

The workers who saw what happened called for the company's first responder team.

Blake was in the cafeteria at the time, and raced to the production floor. As soon as he saw Litwhiler lying there, he sent someone for the defibrillator. He also sent someone to his truck to get his medic kit.

In addition to working as a mechanic for Thompson's and serving on the plant's first responder team, Blake volunteers as captain of the Hobbie EMS.

CPR Begins

Blake shook the fallen man's shoulder and called his name, then leaned his face toward Litwhiler's nose and mouth, hoping to feel a breath. There was nothing.

Without hesitating, Blake breathed into Litwhiler's mouth twice, then started CPR.

After a time, he stopped and checked again for a pulse. Still, nothing.

He gave more breaths and began pumping on Litwhiler's chest again.

That's when Don Uren, the

plant engineer and head of the safety team, showed up with the automatic defibrillator, or AED.

Giving a Shock

The company had bought the machine at the suggestion of the safety team just about a year ago, after another employee suffered a heart attack on the job, Thompson said.

It cost about \$1,500 to \$2,000, she said. "But we thought it was an investment in case God forbid we ever needed it," she said.

Uren and Blake hooked the device to Litwhiler's bare chest and turned it on.

After briefly analyzing him, the device directed them to push the red button that would trigger an electric shock.

Uren hit the button. Then the two men continued CPR. By that time, someone had brought Blake's kit to him.

He used a mask with a pump to give Litwhiler breaths while Uren continued the chest compressions.

Beside them, the automatic defibrillator counted down the seconds until the next analysis.

"After 45 seconds, he took his first effective breath," Blake said. "Then he took another breath at 15 seconds."

'I do now'

For the next minute-and-a-half, Blake gave Litwhiler an extra two pumps of air between each breath the fallen man took himself.

After 90 more seconds, Litwhiler was breathing completely on his own, and his pulse was a normal 72 beats per minute.

Blake gave him some oxygen from the company's nursing station, and after briefly spitting up, Litwhiler began to regain consciousness, Blake said.

By the time paramedics arrived, Litwhiler was speaking again. "They asked him if he had a heart condition," Blake said. "And he said, 'I guess I do now.'"

The paramedics took him to Geisinger Medical Center while Thompson called the cardiologist who treats her and her husband, David. The doctor met the ambulance at the emergency room.

Litwhiler stayed in intensive care one day, Thompson said. He remains in the hospital for treatment, but should be released soon.

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