

## Prayers indirectly brought life-saving defibrillator to church

### Member whose heart stopped sought donation

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When Natasha Fleischman was 33, she went into sudden cardiac arrest in St. Paul.

Paramedics used a defibrillator on her heart to get it restarted on that day in 2002, said Fleischman, now 41, who lives in Lake Elmo.

On Monday, there were a lot of “thanks” to go around.

Fleischman, who has become active in WomenHeart and other organizations, arranged for the donation of an Automatic External Defibrillator to St. Peter Claver Church in St. Paul. The Rev. Kevin McDonough said the church is grateful to have it.

At Monday’s event, Fleischman met for the first time the St. Paul firefighters who helped save her life. She hugged each of the four members who made up the Medic 10 crew at the time.

Only about 10 percent of people who go into sudden cardiac arrest survive, although that figure is 20 percent in St. Paul, said St. Paul Fire Chief Tim Butler.

“Every minute someone is down without defibrillation, the chance of survival decreases by 10 percent,” Fleischman said.

When it happened to Fleischman — who said she was healthy, ate well and exercised — a co-worker gave her CPR and paramedics had to use a defibrillator five times to restart her heart. Doctors found Fleischman’s heart was severely enlarged for unknown reasons, she said.

Fleischman was immediately put on a list for a heart transplant but ended up not needing one. She had a defibrillator implanted into her heart; she’s now on her third device.

When Fleischman heard **Defibtech, based in Guilford, Conn.**, was donating 10 Automatic External Defibrillators nationwide, she lobbied for St. Peter Claver, which she has attended for 15 years. It was “the church that prayed for me when they were saying, ‘She’s not going to survive,’” said Fleischman, a Stillwater Area Public Schools board member.

St. Peter Claver is a busy place — 1,000 people attend Mass each weekend, and the church sponsors an overflow homeless shelter for two months each year and has an elementary school on site, Fleischman said.

AEDs are intended to be used by ordinary people to restart someone’s heart until first responders arrive.

The firefighters who came to Fleischman’s rescue in 2002 were Capt. Ken Schramm, retired fire equipment operator Toni Terry, Sean McLay and Dave Rychlicki.

Seeing Fleischman’s good quality of life today “is pretty remarkable,” McLay said.

Added Terry, “It’s such a blessing to know that you do make a difference. We know that we do in general, but it’s nice to hear specific stories.”

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Natasha Fleishman greets St. Paul firefighter Dave Rychliki, one of the first to respond when she suffered a cardiac arrest in 2002 at age 33. They met Monday morning at St. Peter Claver Church in St. Paul, where Fleischman presented an Automatic External Defibrillator to the church. (Pioneer Press: John Doman)