

Donated AED helps save Camp Copneconic counselor in cardiac arrest

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(WJRT) (6/21/2018) - The staff at Camp Copneconic spent last week training their new counselors on what to do during various types of emergencies.

"And it was during one of those drills that we had a true emergency happen," said staff member Thomas Bawden.

Austin Poley, 19, suddenly collapsed as he ran across the beach while practicing a missing swimmer drill. Bawden said someone ran to get one of their three AEDs, as he began CPR on Poley.



"It was a rush of emotions while it was happening, you know. Scary. It was my first time seeing this in real life," he said.

Within minutes, and before the ambulance arrived, Bawden said Poley was up and talking.

"It was the AED and the quick care he received that saved his life," Bawden said.

That AED was donated two years ago by Mary Smith, president of the Thomas Smith Memorial Foundation. Austin's mom reached out to Smith, sharing a photo of her son smiling with the AED.

"It did bring tears to my eyes," Smith said. "Their team, their counselors knew what to do. They saved this young man's life."

Austin, like Smith's son, Thomas, had no idea he had a heart condition.

Thomas died in 2011 at just 17 years old.

"He had gone through eight years of sports physicals and his heart condition had never been detected," she said. "In our mind, he was a healthy young man, you know -- football, basketball, track, he played the drums. And he was gone in one second."

Now in his name, Smith offers heart screenings to middle and high schoolers at no cost. So far, they've checked 3,000 teenagers and detected undiagnosed heart conditions in 29 of them.

Knowing not everyone will be checked prompted Smith's donation of the AEDs throughout Genesee County.

"You put the pads on the chest and it detects whether or not that person is in (ventricular fibrillation), if they need a shock. If they do, it does it itself," she said.

The shock is designed to bring the person's heart back into a normal rhythm, saving their life.

"He will be fine now," Smith said. "And, I know that my son Thomas is smiling."

The Thomas Smith Memorial Foundation will have its next free heart screenings right before the school year starts. For more information, click on the "Related Links" on the right side of this story.