

“Next to creating a life the finest thing a man can do is save one.”
- Abraham Lincoln

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GRAB ONE • I'M FREE!

Two guys, one goal...

Save as many lives as possible

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“Are you going to be a jerk?” Joel Vogel’s wife Laurie, asked, “Or are you going to let me take you to the hospital?”

On Mother’s Day 2004, Joel and Laurie, who live in St. Joseph, were doing yard work. “I had a shovel in my hand and a cigar in my mouth and felt like throwing up. I thought I must have inhaled the cigar so I put it out on my workbench.”

After wishing a neighbor a happy Mother’s Day, they went into their garage to watch an approaching thunderstorm, and Joel got sick again. “Laurie looked at me and said, “What’s wrong, are you having a heart attack?”

“What are the symptoms?” he asked.

“Left arm numb, hard time breathing and sweating.”

He had all three. “I know this isn’t right,” he said. “Take me to the hospital.”

Their daughter Kayla, home from college studying to be a surgical technician, called 911, and Joel was given an aspirin. Within 10 minutes, the St. Joseph police showed up with oxygen, followed by the rescue squad. In the ambulance Joel began to pass out. “I remember looking out the window and thinking, “What a nice day to die. I was not afraid. A feeling of peace came over me, and God was truly with me. I could see Laurie and Kayla following in the car behind me and a rainbow to the north. It is hard to describe this total feeling of peace, however, I know I will be with God when I die. What a blessing to have experienced this.”

Three times on the way to the hospital Joel needed nitroglycerin under the tongue to keep him alive. He was lucky, because only 5 percent of those who have heart attacks or sudden cardiac arrest and black out actually make it.

After shaving body hairs in preparation for surgery, Joel had wanted to say goodbye to his family, but he went out again. He was rushed into the emergency room. His “widow-maker” artery was clogged 100 percent. The other four were 90, 80, 80, and 70. Six stents later, Joel’s view of life was changed forever.



In this photo, Joel Vogel is showing that this Smart Cabinet holding an AED is still working at -29 below zero. Contributed photo



Rich Feneis (left) and Joel Vogel (right) stand next to one of the AEDs installed in the St. Cloud area. The two have worked to get AEDs out to 26 central Minnesota cities and more than 100 locations in recent years. The AED is housed in a Smart Cabinet, which has made all the difference in getting AEDs out to all these locations. Contributed photo by AdvocatesforHealth.org.

Changed Life

Joel realized how lucky he had been. He knew he had to lessen the stress in his life. He quit working in the printing field and started at Eagle Trace Golf Course, running events to raise money for organizations. He volunteered at the St. Cloud Hospital in the Mended Heart program and discovered that most response times for emergencies is 8-10 minutes, and by that time, many people with cardiac issues have died. He also discovered that even though 482 life-saving AEDs (automated external defibrillator) existed in Stearns County, they were all locked inside facilities, and difficult to get at. He wondered why they were not available 24/7, and was told if they were outside, they would be stolen; or kids would take them and try to shock a drunk buddy; or they would freeze up in the winter, or overheat in the summer.

So he decided to look into that while raising money

at golf tournaments to add more AEDs in central Minnesota, so defibrillators were available to people.

Rich Feneis

Meanwhile, Joel’s friend, Rich Feneis, 70, of Sartell, decided to get involved.

“We found that Centracare Foundation had developed a grant program that allowed you to get a free AED. So I put together a compelling argument and sent it to them. I’m kind of the unofficial mayor of Pine Point Road in Sartell where I live, and Centracare said since no public buildings existed, where would I put it? I said in my heated garage, where other neighbors could get to it.”

But he got turned down.

“I’m not one of those people you easily say ‘no’ to, so I researched more information to have an AED outside accessible, and discovered the city of Centerville, Ohio, had nine AEDs outside. They’d had the same concerns about theft, freezing, overheating, and kids playing with them, but their Park Supervisor, Ken Carter, said they had Smart Cabinets for their AEDs, heated in winter and cooled in summer, and nothing had happened in the two

More AED on BACK PAGE

years the AEDs had been outside and available.”

Rich reapplied to Centracare Foundation, offering a pilot program. “Everybody likes pilot programs,” Rich said with a smile. This time they said “Yes,” for three of them in the St. Cloud area. Next were the cabinets, about \$5,500 each, money he got from neighbors.

The polar vortex of 2018-19 soon tested the Smart Cabinets with 59 below zero wind chill.

“But the cabinets dropped to 35 or 36 degrees for a week of nonstop weather like that,” said Rich. Problem solved.

Rich wanted to give back to the community, and decided adding AEDs was the way. The Centracare Foundation agreed, and Rich and Joel decided to combine on a non-profit, “because we work good together. We started Advocates for Health, a non-profit, and got matching grant money to add more AEDs starting in the city of St. Joseph.”

Where are the AEDs?

Not only were central Minnesota AEDs inside facilities, but where? Advocates for Health made sure the information got shared among Centracare, local sheriffs, and other officials.

How many were still working? Rich hired nursing student Molly Young, who checked every AED to see if the pads and batteries were good. One in five weren’t, but were brought up to speed. Nationally, Rich says, batteries going dead, or pads being outdated, hit about 35 percent.

“Even with an AED available, it might not work. Our technology checks the viability of the batteries six times a day, and lets us know if the batteries are expiring. It’s like having a guard monitoring the functionality 24/7, 365 days a year.”

Then Joel asked Geocom, a St. Cloud company that works with 911 systems, if they would map out the locations of the Stearns County AEDs so sheriff’s dispatchers would know the locations.

“They developed an overlay for free, the first county in the U.S. with the overlay, so if someone is down with a heart attack, the 911 dispatcher can press a button and tell where the closest one is,” said Joel. “That’s big, because if we can get an AED on the scene, the 5 percent survival rate soars to 75 or 80 percent.”

“For every minute a person is out with a heart attack or sudden cardiac arrest, they lose 10 percent of their chance for survival. Most first responders take longer than 10 minutes to get there. St. Joseph’s is seven minutes to get to the fire hall before they respond, and they get over 500 calls a year, of which about 75-80 percent are medical calls.”

Different areas have different response times, depending on their size and who the first responders are.

“By state law,” Joel says, “all 550 school districts are required to have an AED readily accessible.”

Rich discovered that the standard operating procedure at many schools is to give assistant



Kaitlyn Gilk with one of the new outside AEDs at Blackberry Ridge Golf Course in Sartell. *Contributed photo*

coaches a key for the building, and if something happens, they can run and get it from the building.

“That’s their method for complying with state law. We think every school district should have two of these units outside, so when grandparents go to their grandkids’ athletic events, people won’t have to try to first find the person who has the key, if he or she is there, and run to the school, because most of them are still locked. It’s ridiculous when you think that if the AEDs were outside and available, they could save a life.”

How does an AED Work?

A sign by the road indicates an AED location, and when someone takes it out of the cabinet, a photo is taken of the person, and it goes to a call center that sends it to the proper authorities. A built-in SIM cell card contacts 911 rescue services using the strongest signal in the area.

The AED works only in case of an emergency. Joel said, “If you hook it up to somebody, and you push the start button, it determines if the heart needs to have a shock. So it won’t work if you try to shock someone who is passed out. If the AED is needed, a video starts, telling people how to use it.”

Rich said using an AED can become a life-changing

event. “A 40-year-old guy with a wife and three kids lives or dies. If he dies, he will miss all the things his kids do, like grow up and get married. So one event like that can change many lives.”

A man recently saved by an AED, died of other issues in the hospital a week later. Rich

says, “We attended the wake and expressed condolences that we couldn’t have saved him. One of his children said, ‘You don’t get it. We had a chance to say goodbye. Otherwise he would be dead and it would be all over.’ So it’s haunting what a difference it makes to a family to say goodbye.”

AEDs in all the central Minnesota towns are in areas familiar to everybody. Joel says they asked police, sheriffs, and city officials where AEDs in their areas would make the most sense. For example, “In St. Joseph,” Joel says, “everybody knows where the city hall is or the fire hall, so we’re putting the AEDs where people can see them and identify where they are at.”

Joel added that they’ve been to more than 20 central Minnesota towns installing AED Smart Cabinets, and speaking to different groups, “Rotary groups, Optimist Clubs, lake associations, neighborhood groups, chambers of commerce, and Lions Club, who have been phenomenal in working with these. We’d like to talk wherever they would have us. More people are seeing them and wanting them, and we’re hoping to cover the entire state of Minnesota.”

Joel said, “We have a vision. Our vision is placing AEDs in outdoor Smart Monitored cabinets while training community members on how to perform CPR and how to use an AED, we will be able to increase the odds of surviving a Sudden Cardiac Arrest from 5 percent to 75 percent.”

Rich says, “The question I have for everyone who reads this article is, ‘Do you know where the closest AED is to your house? It should be within eight minutes of you going there to get it and coming back.’”

Success Sidebar

Mapping showed that Paynesville did not have an AED. Joel said, “A sixteen-year-old Girl Scout took it on as a project. She went to Paynesville and got permission and found where the AEDs were and raised money to put five units in, and her electrician grandfather hooked them up. She got a Gold Award, the first one in Paynesville in 25 years. She was also most recently honored in San Diego as one of CPR Foundation’s 40 people under 40 years of age national award.”

Joel and Rich also received a text message recently from Cold Spring Police officer Eric Boecher. “He said he just wanted us to know that an AED saved a man’s life up in the arena in Richmond, because people knew where the AED was, and how to use it, thanks to you guys.”

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One of the many AEDs installed in central Minnesota. *Contributed photo*

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