

By Mark Kolbinger, Contributing Writer 955 November 22nd, 2023 @ 10:51 am

<https://patriotnewsmn.com/news/team-effort-aed-saves-clear-lake-resident-grams>



Sweet Reunion. Sherwood Shores resident Tom Grams is alive today thanks to the efforts of his neighbors, Sherburne County Sheriff's Deputies and EMS first responders, including those from the Mayo ambulance service and members of the Clear Lake Fire and Rescue Department. Last Saturday, Grams and a group of the responders gathered at the site of the neighborhood-based AED that was used to help shock his heart after Grams suffered a sudden cardiac arrest October 2 at his home. Pictured: CLFD Chief Ron Koren, Chad Koren, Kari Koren, Anthony Baert, Tom Grams, Mina Grams, Jerry Borth, Carleen Janey, Deputy Shawnee Rathbun, Deputy Jami Neyssen, Colleen Knafla and Branden Weis (photo by Mark Kolbinger).

Tom Grams says he has a “whole new outlook on life” after a series of fortunate events, as well as an entire team of caring humans, helped save his life by utilizing a recently installed AED after he suffered a medical emergency on October 2 at his home in the Sherwood Shores development in Clear Lake Township.

Earlier in the day, Tom had went to help a friend with some projects and had even commented to his wife, Mina, that he had never felt so good.

“Then later that night, I came home and had a cardiac arrest,” Grams said last Saturday, as he recounted the story during a reunion attended by his wife, neighbors and a group of the EMS workers who helped save his life.

After finishing dinner on October 2, Tom went out to clean up the grill and when he didn’t return, Mina found him sitting in a chair in a darkened garage.

“I knew he was in trouble,” recalled Mina. After a brief attempt to get Tom into a vehicle to transport to the hospital, Mina placed calls for help.

First on the scene were the couple’s neighbors, Jerry and Carleen, the latter whom who just happens to be a nurse.

Using flashlights and headlights from vehicles, Carleen performed CPR on Tom as a dispatcher from Sherburne County counted out the rhythm over a cell phone to ensure the proper pace.

“It’s a lot different doing CPR on a person you know rather than on a [CPR practice] dummy,” Carleen said.

During this time, Jerry ran down the street and through the neighborhood to retrieve the Automated External Defibrillator (AED) from a station that had been installed just weeks prior.

When he returned with the device, Carleen used it to shock Tom’s heart three different times before Sherburne County Deputies Shawnee Rathbun and Jami Neyssen arrived on scene to take over.

Deputy Neyssen recounted the “terrible feeling” she had as she was forced to wait for a train to pass on the tracks before being able to get to the scene.

Once on site, the deputies also used the AED to deliver an electrical charge to Tom’s heart and then members of the Clear Lake Fire Department arrived and used their LUCAS machine to continue CPR efforts.

A LUCAS machine is a mechanical device that delivers consistent chest compressions to patients suffering from sudden cardiac arrest.

“Without the machine, we have to switch off and have a new person doing CPR every minute and a half,” said CLFD Chief Ron Koren.

Tom and Mina’s home sits right next to the border between Haven and Clear Lake Townships. If they had been just one house further down, the CLFD would not have been paged because it would have been out of their jurisdiction.

Koren said it has been over five years since the Clear Lake Lions provided his department with two of the LUCAS machines, which can cost as much as \$20,000 each.

Eventually, Grams was transported to the St. Cloud Hospital and was finally stabilized. He currently attends cardiac rehab several times a week as he recovers. It wasn't until after the ambulance had left and Jerry went to drive Mina to the hospital that the neighbors realized they had both been barefoot the entire time.

"I lost about a week's worth of my memories," Grams said Saturday, as he reflected on all that had happened since that day. "I have no recollection whatsoever of what happened."

As Carleen reflected on the incident, she marveled at how everything seemed to come together at just the right time.

"I even remember asking Jerry just days before where exactly they had put the AED station," recalled Carleen. She then nodded to Tom and said, "I didn't know if you were going to make it."

In the weeks after Tom's emergency, several members of the neighborhood signed up to take a class offered by Haven Township on how to operate the AED's (see related story).

At last Saturday's reunion, Grams took the time to thank everyone who played a part in his miraculous survival and reflect on how so many fortuitous events and individuals played a part.

"Everything really fell into place that day," Grams said to the group. "I'm grateful to everyone for being there that day . . . my life is going to continue because of you."