

Guards union replaces stolen Enfield defibrillator

By Karen Pelkey

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ENFIELD — A local union representing 1,800 state prison employees has donated a lifesaving, \$2,500 automatic external defibrillator to the town, two months after the original lifesaving equipment was stolen from the first-floor of Town Hall.

The device, called an AED for short and used to jumpstart the hearts of people in cardiac arrest, was reported missing by Town Hall staff in late April.

When members of Connecticut State Prison Employees Union Local 391 heard about the theft and learned Enfield had no money to replace the device, they felt compelled to act, union President Jon Pepe said.

Town officials say they knew

about the union's donation before Monday night's Town Council meeting, where the device was presented.

But an additional gift — a \$500 wall-mounted AED case complete with alarm and flashing lights — came as a complete surprise.

"If someone's trying to steal it again, people will be alerted. It's a deterrent," Pepe said.

Mayor Patrick Tallarita, who accepted the donations on behalf of Enfield from union Treasurer Todd Sokolowski, said he was floored by their actions.

"For the corrections union to recognize not only the value of an automatic defibrillator machine like that ... but to step up to the plate without being asked is a kind gesture on their part," Tallarita said. "This shows that they're a part of the community and they care about our community."

Prior to the machine being replaced, town emergency staff borrowed one of Enfield's 21 other AED devices from a backup police patrol car and kept it in the town clerk's office under lock and key.

The problem with that, though, is that nobody could access the device if needed after business hours, such as during regular town meetings, EMS Director Gary Wiemokly said.

With cardiac arrest practically a death sentence before the AEDs became available, Wiemokly said, the new devices are more lightweight and can save lives faster than the older, bulkier devices only certified paramedics are trained to use once an ambulance arrives on scene.

"Now you have a much greater chance of having that person survive and return to a normal life," Wiemokly said. "Anyone ... can take a new CPR class, and they also

teach how to use the automatic external defibrillators."

About 130 of Enfield's 350 employees, including all 94 sworn police officers, have received voluntary training to use the device, according to Gail Miller of the town Human Resources Department.

There are six machines for non-police use around town, and locations other than Town Hall include the Angelo Lamagna Activities Center, the Enfield Senior Center, Enfield Adult Daycare, the Enfield Public Library, and the Public Works Department.

There are perhaps four fully trained staff at each of those locations, Miller said.

Money for the original group of defibrillators came from a combination of state grants and the town budget, Wiemokly said, adding he's still stumped as to why someone would want to steal something that

can do no more than the heroic task of jumpstarting someone's heart.

"It serves no other purpose; they have one purpose and one purpose alone, and that's to shock a heart back into a rhythm. You can't make toast or cook a hamburger, you can't even put it on your enemy and try to kill them with one," he said. "It's truly a real shame."

Tallarita says if the thief was a young person who thought stealing the device was a joke, he'd do best to think about the consequences of his crime.

"It's not something cute and funny to do ... How would that individual feel if that following afternoon we had a heart attack and that defibrillator wasn't available?"

Enfield maintenance crews plan to mount the new device in its original location by early next week, Wiemokly said.

Suffield ZPC approves creation of village districts