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NEWS RELEASE

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Fort Worth Police Officer miraculously survives ‘widowmaker’ heart attack
CPR and an AED that saved three coworkers helped him survive

FORT WORTH, Texas- He felt an icy tingling sensation in his throat but ignored it. The feeling was familiar because he experienced it sometimes during a tough workout. This time, that icy sensation came on while Fort Worth Police Officer Terrence Parker finished loading a Tahoe full of FWPD Recruitment equipment for a Spartan Race in Austin. Moments later, Parker fell unconscious on the ground and remained there clinically dead for approximately 15 minutes.

During that busy morning on Thursday, May 16, 2024, Parker took a break after loading the Tahoe and collapsed inside a room at the Bob Bolen Public Safety Complex. Luckily, coworkers saw his phone drop to the floor before seeing him fall and immediately knew something was wrong.

As soon as he hit the floor, Police and Fire personnel sprang into action to perform CPR. It took less than two minutes for them to assess the situation and begin chest compressions. The timing was crucial. Almost every coworker who was working to save his life has known him for more than five years. This was personal.

Doctors later told Parker that the chest compressions were critical to his survival; they released some of the blockage in his heart’s biggest artery, known as the left anterior descending (LAD).

Then, the Automated External Defibrillator (AED) was brought in – the same device that had saved the lives of three other officers at the public safety complex. Since Parker’s incident last month, this AED has been considered sacred. Some ask if it should be placed on a pedestal, not to be touched or used because it is so sacred. Or does it stay mounted to the wall, to potentially help save more lives?

AEDs are devices that apply an electric charge or current to the heart to restore a normal heartbeat. If the heart rhythm stops due to cardiac arrest, also known as sudden cardiac arrest (SCA), a defibrillator may help it start beating.

Parker was shocked six times by the AED.

The scene was chaotic. While a handful of Fire and Police personnel were working on the logistics of transporting him to the hospital, others were working to revive him. They say his body would tense up after every shock. Officers say at one point, Parker shed a tear while being charged. One officer could be heard in the background cheering him on, “You’re not going anywhere!”

“Fortunately, it happened here at Bob Bolen, where we have all the resources, training, and proper equipment on site to get him stabilized and transported as quickly as possible,” said Fort Worth Firefighter Craig Trojacek.

The stabilization efforts that took place with Parker before he was transported reduced the number of tasks the doctors had to do at the hospital, which means they were quickly able to treat the heart attack.

Parker suffered what’s known as a “widowmaker” heart attack, which, according to the Cleveland Clinic, happens when there is a blockage in the LAD artery. That means blood can’t move through the LAD, which provides 50% of the heart muscle’s blood supply.

“Confusion. I feel confused,” says Officer Parker of how he’s feeling after his brush with death. “Why me? Why now? I have survivor’s guilt, like in the military when you survive a traumatic or deadly attack. Why am I the lucky one? What is my purpose?”

Parker is a dedicated public servant. Before serving 14 years in law enforcement, 11 of those at FWPD, he served 31 years in the U.S. Army (Military Police K9).

When asked what is a lesson he hopes to share with others?

“Get your yearly physical. Get checked each year. Don’t second-guess yourself. I didn’t think this would happen to me. I’m in the gym all the time,” says Parker. “You just don’t know what’s going on inside until a doctor can have a look.”

Until two weeks ago, he may have gone to the doctor approximately eight times in his entire life, he says.

The other lesson?

“Take AED training seriously. Take CPR classes and be confident with the knowledge you have once you’re certified,” Parker says. “You never know when you may be the person to save another life. I’m proof. It works.”

On Tuesday, June 4, Fort Worth City Council members recognized and honored Parker and the team of Fort Worth Police Officers, Firefighters, and MedStar personnel involved in saving Parker’s life. Pictures from the meeting can be found in the Media Portal.

Parker does not have any side effects from the heart attack, which doctors tell him is incredibly rare. He says his health is now his priority because he realizes it’s not just about him. With a loving wife and children, he’s got a lot of life left to live.

Fort Worth Police and Fire are bringing awareness to National CPR and AED Awareness Week, recognized yearly from June 1-7. Officer Parker’s story of resilience and the lifesaving measures taken by his First Responder family is a real-life example of how these skills can apply to anyone willing to learn CPR and how to use an AED.

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