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EDITORIAL

Learning from tragedy

SOMETIMES PERSONAL tragedies can be turned into positive action for entire community. A case in point is Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia. Gioia's father, Emilio, died of cardiac arrest while he was walking his dog near his Richmond home. The tragedy was that the senior Gioia was only 58 years old and that he probably could have been saved if there had been a defibrillator nearby.

This horrible incident has moved John Gioia to lead the charge for having 13 Lifepak portable defibrillators installed in public spaces throughout West County.

The installation is part of the team effort between the county Emergency Medical Services and the AMR ambulance company to install 65 defibrillators throughout the county. Each year AMR plans to donate 15 additional machines.

Gioia's District 1 is the first to mount all of its defibrillators. The small devices need no prior instruction to operate. The defibrillators actually have a recorded voice that gives instructions to the user.

A heart attack is caused by a blockage in the heart, but cardiac arrest is an interruption of the flow of electrical energy. A defibrillator gives the heart an electrical jolt that can sometimes restart it. It is essential to apply the jolt to the heart as quickly as possible because with each passing moment the chances of patient survival decrease.

A new state law requires defibrillators in all official buildings. It is a good law because these devices can literally be lifesavers.

We are sorry that Gioia had such a horrible personal experience, but we admire his resolve to turn that personal tragedy into positive action that can help us all.