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**COUNTY INSTALLS 13 PORTABLE DEFIBRILLATORS  
DEVICES REQUIRE NO TRAINING TO USE, HAVE CHANGED HOW MEDICS TREAT CARDIAC  
ARRESTS**

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Article Text:

Emilio **Gioia** was walking his dog in the park across the street from his Richmond home when cardiac arrest hit. By the time an ambulance arrived, his heart had stopped beating beyond the few survivable moments. He died at 58.

"My father was the classic case," said Supervisor John **Gioia** of Richmond, who has secured placement in public agencies for 13 portable defibrillators throughout West Contra Costa, eight donated by the county and five by its ambulance provider. "If he had been revived within six minutes, he would have lived."

Contra Costa County Emergency Medical Services and AMR have teamed up to make 65 potentially life-saving portable defibrillators available throughout the county -- a donation that adds up to about \$123,000. Each year AMR will donate an additional 15.

**Gioia's** District 1 is the first to mount all of its defibrillators.

Portable defibrillators, which require no training to use, have changed the way cardiac arrests are treated. They've prompted the American Heart Association -- which once advised administering CPR, then calling for help -- to change its guidelines.

The smaller-than-a-laptop device instructs the user through voice prompts to bare the victim's chest, then apply two small electrodes, which will first assess whether an electrical jolt is necessary then discharge it.

"An eighth-grader can use this device," said R.N. Ruth Burk, who is coordinating placement of the devices for Contra Costa County Emergency Medical Services.

They are rapidly becoming ubiquitous in airplanes, businesses and health clubs. A new California state law requires them to be made available in official buildings. Chicago's O'Hare Airport has one mounted at three-minute walking intervals throughout the terminal.

For every minute delayed after a cardiac arrest, life expectancy drops 10 percent, Burk said.

Unlike a heart attack, which is a blockage to the heart, a cardiac arrest results from the interruption of the flow of electrical energy. A **defibrillator** packs an electrical jolt that restarts the heart.

Some 300,000 people suffer a cardiac arrest each year, and 90 percent of victims die before they reach a hospital, according to a study by the American Heart Association. Access to a **defibrillator** within the first critical moments could save 40,000 lives a year, said East Bay executive director Shawn Casey.

Antioch resident Doug Avery, 74, "didn't feel a thing" when he was seized by a cardiac arrest while driving. The general contractor slid down onto the seat, side-swiping a car and crashing into a building. A registered nurse, in the car behind him, applied a **defibrillator** to his chest, saving his life.

"That's some good stuff," he said. "My life's not over. I'm still working. Just built a government bank for the Republic of Palau and did a little job down in Trinidad (and) Tobago."

While risk factors for a heart attack are well known -- high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking -- what spurs a cardiac arrest remains largely elusive, although a history of irregular heartbeat is a partial predictor. Seniors tend to be more vulnerable, which is why **Gioia** insisted five defibrillators be placed in senior centers.

The county is also encouraging businesses and private organizations, including churches, to make the investment, said Joe Barger, the defibrillation program's medical director.

At Fremont's Nummi Corp. auto assembly plant, he said, "We had two saves in three years."

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**Caption:**

Photo 1: Lifepak defibrillators are small, light and simple enough for anyone to use without training to help someone in cardiac arrest. Photo 2: SUPERVISOR JOHN **GIOIA** and Ruth Burk talk about how Lifepak defibrillators work Thursday at the Richmond Library. **Gioia**, whose father died of cardiac arrest, has announced that 13 new defibrillators have been installed around West County. (Gregory Urquiaga/ Times)

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