

CARDIOVASCULAR CARE

Caring Extends Beyond Hospital Walls

Joe Thornton suffered two sudden cardiac arrests within five weeks last fall.

Shown: The Thornton family (from left) son Samuel, father Joseph, wife Barbara and son Nathaniel, return for the first time, to Sarah Jane's restaurant in Somerville where Joe suffered cardiac arrest while out to dinner. The incident set into motion a chain of events for Mr. Thornton that included everything from life-saving CPR to having his heart shocked. It also included a cardiac catheterization, second heart attack, implantable defibrillator and more.

KNOWING CPR CAN SAVE LIVES

Family and Friends CPR Classes Hosted by RWJ Mobile Health Services Experts teaches the lifesaving skills of adult hands-only CPR, child CPR with breaths, adult and child AED use, infant CPR and relief of choking in an adult, child or infant.

OPTIONS AVAILABLE AT BOTH CAMPUSES

Registration is required for all classes
Classes are held from 6 to 9 p.m. and cost \$30

RWJ Fitness & Wellness Center,
100 Kirkpatrick Street, New Brunswick, 2nd Floor
Community Room
Friday, June 17
Thursday, August 11
Call 732-937-8686 to register

Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset,
110 Rehill Avenue, Somerville, Computer Training Room
Thursday, May 19
Wednesday, July 13

Call 908-685-2970 to register

The incidents highlighted a strong continuum of care amongst emergency responders, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital and one of its own off-duty nurses.

Mr. Thornton, 62, of Somerville, was eating dinner at Sarah Jane's restaurant in Somerville with his wife and son on Sept. 25 when he suffered his first cardiac arrest. They had just finished their meal when he lost consciousness.

Cathy Moose, a nurse at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset (RWJ Somerset), was also eating at the restaurant and came to Mr. Thornton's aid.

"I saw that he had collapsed at the table and when I went over I saw that he wasn't breathing," said Mrs. Moose, who has been a nurse for 46 years. "I asked for help getting him onto the floor and started CPR."

Somerville Police and the Somerville Rescue Squad arrived, continuing CPR and using an automatic external defibrillator three times to deliver shocks to try to restart his heart. After the third shock, paramedics from RWJ Somerset were able to restore a heart rhythm. He regained consciousness on the way to the hospital's Emergency Department.

After he was stabilized, Patrick Saulino, MD, performed a cardiac catheterization. A contrast dye was injected into Mr. Thornton's arteries and then X-rays were taken to view his arteries, showing several blockages. Over the next few days, interventional cardiologist Jeffrey Taylor, MD, performed two coronary angioplasties, during which three tiny coils called stents were inserted to open his arteries and restore blood flow.

After a week, Mr. Thornton went home wearing a Zoll Life Vest, which was an automatic external defibrillator.

"We treated what was correctable and needed time to allow the heart to heal," said Dr. Saulino. "After 90 days of wearing the vest, we planned to reassess his cardiac function to see if a permanent defibrillator was needed."

On Oct. 31, the vest detected that Mr. Thornton's heart had stopped again while he was sleeping and administered six shocks to restart his heart. His wife woke up to the sound of the vest's alarm and called 911, summoning the Somerville Police, Somerville Rescue Squad and RWJ Somerset paramedics.

Mr. Thornton was brought to RWJ Somerset where he was stabilized. A few days later, he was transferred to RWJ New Brunswick where Sanjukta Sanyal, MD, implanted a defibrillator in his chest, an electronic device which helps regulate the heartbeat and can admit a shock in the event of a cardiac arrest.

Mr. Thornton continues to have regular checkups with Dr. Saulino, who has been treating him since 2009 for cardiomyopathy, a disease of the heart muscle which can affect the heart's normal electrical rhythm. He is looking forward to being able to drive again and returning to work as a physician assistant in the student health center at Princeton University.

Dr. Saulino, who has been in practice since 1989, said Mr. Thornton's case stands out because it is highly unusual to have two cardiac arrests within such a short time frame and he successfully beat incredible odds twice.

"Second chances are minimal with this illness," Dr. Saulino said.

The first critical link in the "chain of survival" for cardiac arrest patients begins with recognizing the problem and then beginning CPR.

Mr. Thornton feels lucky that a nurse was there during his first sudden cardiac arrest to start CPR quickly.

"Lucky is an understatement," he said. "Without Cathy's prompt action, I would not be here today."



Shown from left: Patrick Saulino, MD, is Joe Thornton's primary cardiologist at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset and was an integral part of his care team throughout his journey. Cathy Moose was eating at Sarah Jane's restaurant the evening Mr. Thornton experienced his heart attack and sprung into motion, performing life-saving CPR and ultimately saving Mr. Thornton's life, for the first time. Coincidentally, Ms. Moose also happens to be a nurse at RWJ Somerset.

Dr. Saulino agreed. "He lucked out by having a trained professional who was nearby and administered CPR," he said. "Survival not only depends on performing CPR in a timely manner but the quality of the CPR helps ensure that the individual will regain full neurological functioning."

The rest of the links of the chain, including defibrillation, advanced life support and post-cardiac arrest care, were just as crucial to his successful outcome, Dr. Saulino added.

"I cannot praise enough everyone involved with my care – everybody at RWJ, the paramedics, police and rescue squad," says Mr. Thornton. "They saved my life, not once, but twice."

Visit www.rwjheart.com or
call 1-888-MD-RWJUH.