

A good place to have a heart attack

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Run For The Red marathoner survives with the help of knowledgeable and well-equipped rescuers

John Burrows of Titusville, New Jersey, is less cynical than he used to be, believing even more so now that there are in fact people in the world who won't hesitate to help others in trouble.

If not for such people, Burrows, 50, may not have lived to see his 17-year-old daughter graduate high school this year or see her and his 19-year-old son graduate college and start their own lives.

A Trenton, New Jersey, native, the married father, who supervises accounting operations for the New Jersey Department of Treasury's Office of Management and Budgeting, has been running regularly since the early 2000s to stay in shape. Burrows has run more than 20 marathons, about six ultra-marathons (which are longer than a marathon's 26.2-miles) and a number of 50-kilometer races in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

On May 17, Monroe County hosted the annual Run For The Red marathon to benefit the American Red Cross. This was Burrows' third time taking part in the Run For The Red after he had been in an ultra-marathon just less than two months prior, in March.

"I felt fine," said Burrows, who had never had any medical issues when running previous marathons.

This year's Run For The Red was held on a day with an above-average level of humidity. At about mile-marker 21.5 of the marathon, Burrows felt himself slowing down.

"I just started losing it," he said. "I couldn't keep my pace. I said to myself, 'Boy, I just don't seem to have it in me.'"

'You don't look good'

Feeling a burning sensation in his chest, Burrows slowed to a walk and went off to the side, where three volunteers were handing out bottled water to passing runners.

“They took one look and told me, ‘You don’t look good,’” he said. “I don’t remember any of their names, but they had me sit down and called 911.”

Two of these volunteers, Diane Silance of Saylorsburg and Wendy Gregor of East Stroudsburg, flagged down Stroud Area Regional Police Officer Stephen Hettel.

“I think the plan was for the officer to take me to the hospital,” said Burrows. “I guess that plan didn’t happen because the last thing I remember is walking toward the police car and then collapsing.”

Seeing Burrows was in cardiac arrest, Hettel began CPR on him. Registered nurse Jennifer Moore happened to be in the area, saw what was happening, rushed over and continued CPR.

SARP Officer Charles Brown arrived with an automatic external defibrillator in his police vehicle.

That police vehicles have AEDs is due in large part to the efforts of Monroe County Commissioner John Moyer and his wife, Rachel. Ever since their son, Greg Moyer, died at age 15 while playing in a high school basketball game in 2000, the Moyers have campaigned to have AEDs accessible in every public place and at all public events.

The AED in Brown’s vehicle was made possible through an ESSA Bank & Trust grant. Moore began using this AED on Burrows.

‘The Widow Maker’

Suburban Ambulance personnel Matt Pavlik and Brett Dereamus arrived moments later and began tending to Burrows as other SARP units arrived. SARP Officer Brendon Bingle volunteered to drive the ambulance so that Pavlik and Dereamus, assisted by SARP Cpl. Kenneth Nevil, could continue tending to Burrows in back of the ambulance on the way to Pocono Medical Center.

Dr. John Schleicher and the Cardiac Care Team took charge of Burrows at PMC.

“To give some idea of the severity of this event, Dr. Schleicher referred to Mr. Burrows’ condition as ‘The Widow Maker,’” Run For The Red lead coordinator Bob Werts said during Tuesday’s annual Red Cross dinner, at Peppe’s Bistro in East Stroudsburg, while honoring those who helped Burrows.

Doctors found a piece of plaque along the wall of one of Burrows’ arteries had dislodged and caused a blockage keeping blood from flowing to the heart. Dr. Mark Indzonka of the PMC Cardiac Care Team installed a stint in the artery.

“They told me I was coherent and responding during the operation, but I don’t remember any of that,” said Burrows, who spent the next several days recovering at PMC. “I remember waking up in my hospital bed with my family around me and asking, ‘What the heck happened?’”

Though not something anyone wants to experience, Burrows’ cardiac arrest fortunately happened in a location where there were quick-thinking people who called 911, knew CPR and had an AED ready.

“Location played a vital role” in this case, said Werts. “Because of all the people involved, Mr. Burrows is (still) here with us. We met with him at PMC the day after the race. I told him, ‘It’s a shame that this occurred. But if it had to, there was no better place for it to occur than here, in a community prepared to deal with this event.’ This year, we are especially thankful to all, but certainly to this team that came together in an instant and saved a life.”

The experience has changed Burrows’ outlook on life in some ways.

“My family has always been important to me, but even more so now,” he said. “Life is good. Enjoy and live the best you can each day because the next day isn’t promised. And to the people who helped me that day, I just can’t put into words how grateful my family and I are to each and every one of them.”



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