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Foundation raising awareness for sudden teen cardiac arrests donates life-saving outdoor defibrillator for Hinsdale's Burns Field Park

By ZAREEN SYED

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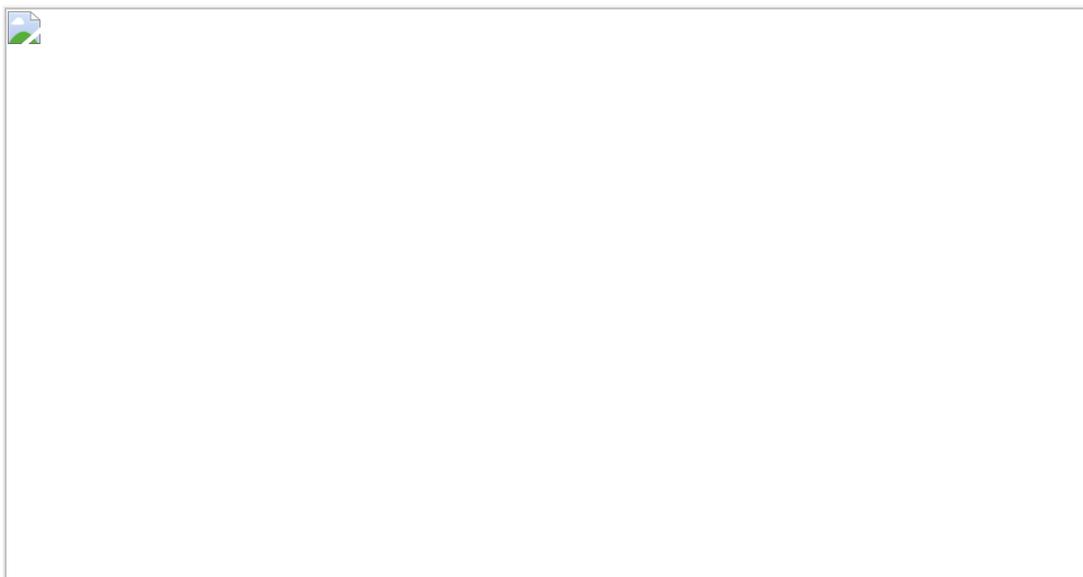
An example of a 24/7 publicly accessible SaveStation AED wall mount similar to the one in Hinsdale's Burns Field Park. (SaveStation)

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On Sept. 21, the Village of Hinsdale will be hosting a ribbon-cutting celebration and dedication for the installation of a SaveStation, which houses a lifesaving defibrillator, in Burns Field Park in honor of Michael Brindley.

Michael died of a sudden cardiac arrest when he was 16 years old.

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“It’s life altering in every way, it’s changed everything for our family,” said Michael’s mom, Kristy Brindley, over the phone.

In the summer of 2016, Michael left home for his third and final year of a six-week summer leadership program at Culver Academies in Indiana. And on what should have been just a regular Tuesday evening after a camp basketball game, he suffered a cardiac arrest.

“We lost him that night,” Brindley said. “What we decided to do was try and save another family and try to spare them this kind of heartache. The more we learned about how many young people lose their lives to cardiac arrest in the United States and some of the things that can be done to help prevent this, we launched ourselves into this foundation. Michael left us with a very important mission.”

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Brindley and her family started the Just1Mike Foundation to raise awareness of sudden cardiac death by funding projects that could “save young hearts.”

One of those projects is the installation of a 24/7 accessible SaveStation AED in Hinsdale's Burns Field Park.

An AED, or an automated external defibrillator, could be the difference between life and death in cases of sudden cardiac arrest.

The 41 inches high, 15 inches wide AED cabinet will be attached to an outside building in Burns Field Park, with the words “public access defibrillation” on top and directions printed on the outside.

“It’s completely accessible for all the families and people in the park, camps that go on there, playground, tennis courts,” said Brindley. “There are homes that border all four sides of that park, so it’s more than just a park, it’s a neighborhood community. Anybody can use it.”

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According to research published in the American Heart Association’s journal *Circulation*, survival from cardiac arrest doubles when a bystander steps in to apply an AED before emergency responders arrive at the scene.

The only problem with that is most public places don’t have an AED on standby — something Canada-based SaveStation hopes to change, even if it’s a long shot.

“Our goal is to have publicly accessible AEDs four minutes apart across North America,” said SaveStation representative, Megan Cavon. “Just a small mission.”

“It might sound like a far-fetched idea, but it’s exactly what we’re going for,” she added. “We talk about the 4-minute mindset when it comes to a sudden cardiac arrest. Every second matters, within four minutes of having a sudden cardiac arrest if they haven’t had CPR or someone using an AED on them, the person can start to experience brain damage and within 10 minutes, they’re brain-dead.”

Along with the AED cabinet unveiling at Burns Field Park on Sept. 21, the Hinsdale Fire Department will offer CPR demonstrations with help from the Just1Mike Junior Board.

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A lot of Brindley’s work began with helping to fund and co-sponsor select in-school EKG screenings facilitated by [Young Hearts For Life](#), an Oak Brook-based organization that provides schools with free screenings to detect heart abnormalities in students.

Since launching in 2006, Young Hearts for Life has hosted over 265,000 screenings and identified nearly 3,100 students that had heart conditions they weren't aware of.

“As parents we think our kids are healthy or they're in sports so nothing will happen,” said Kathy Marek, Program Director for Young Hearts for Life. “There's even many doctors that say ‘well there's no family history so you don't have to worry about it.’ But EKGs are such a simple test, painless and these are being offered for free so there's no disadvantage to it.”

Part of the reason why screenings aren't as common in schools is because of the costs, but Marek explained that the organization, led by cardiologist Joseph Marek, put together a system that taps trained volunteers to conduct screenings and enlists sponsors and donors to fund each test.

Per the American Heart Association, cardiac arrest deaths have been climbing in recent years, and the greatest increase is among young Black adults.

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Marek said Young Hearts For Life tries to do more involving diverse communities, but they are limited to the facilities and funding that is available in the neighborhoods surrounding the organization's home base.

Recently, however, the junior board of Young Hearts For Life has funded and volunteered to provide EKG screenings at Mercy Home For Boys & Girls in Chicago.

After being introduced to Young Hearts for Life and signing on as a co-sponsor, the first screening sponsored by Brindley and her family was at Michael's high school, Hinsdale Central.

“I’ve heard from parents who have been notified at the end of the school day after screenings that they found an abnormal result,” she said. It’s the gift of being offered a free EKG test.”

Brindley added that five students were diagnosed with a hidden heart condition following the first screening her family helped sponsor.

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While the pandemic slowed the cause down, it gave them room to develop their [AED program called ‘Saving Lives Together.’](#) The Just1Mike foundation recently made their first mobile AED donation to the Downers Grove youth football and cheer program with Burns Field Park being the second donation.

The SaveStation in Burns Field Park costs about \$4,000 and includes monitoring to ensure that the AED inside is ‘ready for rescue,’ Cavon added. It also takes a photo when opened.

The company has a variety of different AED stations, from wall mounts like the one in Hinsdale, to free standing towers.

“One of the biggest misconceptions about AEDs is that you have to be medically equipped to use them,” Cavon said. “And that’s why we want to have them outside, a lot of times you’ll find AEDs that are locked up at workplaces, so we’re trying to provide this technology that allows all-season, outdoor AED cabinets for general public use at any time.”

While Brindley and her family moved to California three years ago, they said they’ll continue to support the surrounding Hinsdale community that reminds them of their time with Michael, whose sports blog, “Just 1 Mike,” (a riff off radio personalities Mike and Mike) inspired the foundation’s name.

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“He started a blog when he was 13 and had 110 posts in three years . . . we felt it was something we wanted to continue to share. He’s our “one Mike” and was a wonderful, loving, affectionate young man,” she added. “He had so much promise and so much more to give and that’s why we do what we do, the kids that we’re losing are catastrophic losses to families, and a great loss to our society. We’re trying to help protect young hearts and we are just going to keep on moving forward with that.”

Event details:

Tuesday, Sept. 21, 5:30 p.m. at Burns Field Park, 320 N Vine St, Hinsdale

For more information on sudden cardiac arrest, visit the [American Heart Association](#).

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