

“A truly remarkable string of events occurred that day.”

Skier falls victim to Sudden Cardiac Arrest, ski patrollers deliver life-saving shocks

It was early Saturday morning in February 2010 when Steve Nakano picked up his friend, Bob Gillingham, for a day of downhill skiing at Crystal Mountain, (Wash.). “We made the two-hour drive from Seattle in record time,” recalls Steve. “We unloaded our gear, put on our boots, grabbed our skis, and headed to the ticket booth.”

Steve says he walked about 100 yards when he felt a sharp pain in his chest. “I had been complaining of chest pains but my cardiologist assured me that there was nothing wrong with my heart and that my recent stent placement was a success. The pain only lasted about 15 seconds. I assured Bob that I was okay. We got our tickets and I started to put on my ski jacket — that’s the last thing I remember before waking up in the hospital.”

“What Steve doesn’t remember,” says Bob, “is that we had taken the first chair up to the midway point, skied over to the next chair, and got in line. Just before the chair hit our legs to go up, Steve fell to the ground.” Bob says he jumped out of the way, asked the attendant to call 9-1-1. “Steve was unresponsive and struggling to breathe. A woman who had been in line behind us, ran over to help me. She turned out to be an ER nurse. We started CPR.”



Four months after suffering Sudden Cardiac Arrest, Steve Nakano and his companion of six years, Susanne Sherburne, climbed to the top of Mt. St. Helens. “I’m living proof that AEDs save lives.”

On the next hill over, Jess Culver and Greta Bowen, full-time Ski Patrollers for Crystal Mountain, were on bump duty when dispatch radioed a code one medical emergency. “We immediately clicked into our skis and raced down the hill,” says Jess. “As we neared the bottom of the trail, we saw a man on the ground, his lips were blue. A woman was next to him, trying to find a pulse and a gentleman was checking airway.” Greta continues, “I took over airway and Jess made her way to the lift shack, about 10 feet away.”

“I knew just by looking at the victim that we needed an AED,” says Jess. “I also knew where to find one.” A week earlier, Jess had helped install a new Philips HeartStart AED at that particular lift. “Within seconds, I returned with the AED. Just like in training, I pressed the green ON button and listened to the voice prompts while I followed the illustrations on the pads and placed them on Steve’s chest. The AED went into analyze mode. It said “shock advised”. We pressed the orange SHOCK button and delivered a shock. We got an irregular rhythm. The system went into analyze mode again and advised another shock. We delivered a second shock and that’s when we got a regular rhythm.” Steve had fallen victim to Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA).



“Performing CPR is crucial, but CPR alone would not have saved Steve that day,” says Jess (R), pictured here with Greta (L) “It’s a long drive or a flight from where he was on the mountain to a hospital. Immediate access to an AED is why we’re going to see him on the slopes for seasons to come.”

Cardiologist Nathan Every, MD, FACC, happened to ski by when he saw Greta and Jess working on Steve. He stayed on scene to provide medical counsel and also followed Steve throughout his recovery. “There are three reasons Steve survived Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) on the mountain that day. He dropped at the one place where people would see him drop. There was a defibrillator within immediate reach; if it had been anywhere else on the hill, no one could have gotten it to him fast enough. And the ski patrollers knew what to do – I was really impressed.”

- SCA is one of the leading causes of death in the United States claiming nearly 300,000 lives each year¹
- Sudden cardiac death (SCD) is the major cause of fatalities in males over 34 years of age during hiking or downhill skiing in the mountains²
- For the best chance of survival from the most common cause of SCA, a shock from a defibrillator should be delivered within the first few minutes of collapse³

“The cardiologist told me that I suffered SCA due to a blood clot that had ruptured and blocked 96 percent of my lower left descending artery, sending my heart into a fatal arrhythmia,” says Steve. “He also told me that I was very fortunate that I experienced SCA when and where I did. He said the AED saved my life.” Bob agrees, “If this had happened three minutes later and we were 50 feet up in the chair it would have been a different story.”

Steve says he’s not sure why he’s been given a second chance. “A truly remarkable string of events occurred that day. I am grateful to the people who came to my aid when I needed it most. I also know that AEDs save lives.”



To learn more about Philips HeartStart AEDs and how to implement an AED program in your workplace, visit www.philips.com/workplace or call 1.800.453.6860

¹ American Heart Association. 2010 Heart and Stroke Statistical Update. Dallas, Texas: American Heart Association, 2010, pg e13
² <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18269184>
³ Cummins R.O., et al. Improving survival from sudden cardiac arrest: The “Chain of Survival” concept. A statement for health professionals from the Advanced Cardiac Life Support Subcommittee and the Emergency Cardiac Care Committee, American Heart Association. Circulation 1991; 83:1832-1847.

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