

Tahoe fire agencies improve cardiac care

By Kathryn Reed

Saving lives is nothing new for fire departments. How they do it, though, changes regularly as technology evolves.

Two agencies in the Lake Tahoe Basin this month were recognized by Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval as a Heart Safe Community – Tahoe Douglas and North Lake Tahoe fire protection districts. The mission of Nevada Project Heartbeat is to save lives through promotion of early defibrillation, education in sudden cardiac arrest, and promotion of training in AED-CPR.

In the United States, more people age 40 and older die of sudden cardiac arrest than anything else. That is one of the main reasons there is a strong push to get AED units distributed to areas beyond the typical medical facility.

Automated external defibrillators – or AEDs – can save lives. They are portable devices that shock the heart back into action. The machines require little training to use.

It is because the fire districts have worked at getting them distributed into their respective communities that the governor singled them out.

“It’s pretty big,” Eric Guevin of Tahoe Douglas said of the recognition and program. “It means that the public has access to AEDs, there are people trained to use the AEDs and can perform CPR. It means we should have a higher survival rate than other areas that don’t.”

There are about 60 AEDs in the district. Ten automated defibrillators are at the various stations as well as ones on the engines. They are also at county facilities, including schools

and the Zephyr Cove tennis courts.

Private businesses have bought AEDs in case of an emergency. Guevin said his department has been working on this for a while to get more AEDs in the community, especially in locations where people gather, like the Stateline casinos.

Dispatchers know where they are in Tahoe Douglas so if someone calls 911 with a cardiac emergency, it might be possible to locate a nearby AED to help the patient before paramedics arrive.

Tahoe Douglas gets about 200 cardiac calls a year.

“For every minute that goes by without shocking the heart you lose a 10 percent chance of saving that life,” Guevin told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This program will save lives. Every year more than 200,000 people die of sudden cardiac arrest, according to the American Heart Association.”

A heart attack is when there is an injury to the muscle, whereas sudden cardiac arrest is when heart stops and immediate care is required.