



The Rapides Foundation

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: February 20, 2001
Contact: Vicki Bernard
318-443-3394

THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION AND THE AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION TO BEGIN DEPLOYING AEDS IN AN EFFORT TO INCREASE CARDIAC ARREST SURVIVAL RATES

February 20, 2001 (Alexandria, LA) – The continuing partnership between the American Heart Association and the Rapides Foundation has entered the AED deployment phase. Over the next four months, 75 AEDs will be placed in five Central Louisiana parishes.

The Rapides Foundation has provided the local American Heart Association with \$360,000 to place AEDs in five Central Louisiana parishes. In this first phase, 75 AEDs will be placed in Rapides, Winn, LaSalle, Avoyelles, and Grant parish. “Saving lives is the focus of this project,” said Joe Rosier, president and chief executive officer of the Rapides Foundation. “We believe Central Louisiana will become a role model for the rest of the country on how to bring communities together to be trained and equipped to use these lifesaving devices.” This project is in fact the first comprehensive, rural AED placement project in the United States.

An AED (automated external defibrillator) weighs about five pounds, and is therefore easily portable. “We have known for 40 years that electrical therapy is the most appropriate treatment for sudden cardiac arrest. The only problem has been getting the shock to the patient,” says Erin Cochran, health initiatives manager for the American Heart Association. “The financial support of the Rapides Foundation has made it possible for us to get this life-saving equipment to the people who really need it.”

Once attached to the victim, the machine assesses the heart’s rhythm to determine if a shock is advised. If the machine detects the heart in ventricular fibrillation (a quivering, irregular rhythm), it advises and administers electrical shock to the victim. Currently, a sudden cardiac arrest victim has only 5 percent chance of surviving. Proper implementation of the Chain of Survival, including AED use, increases that survival rate to closer to 60 or 70 percent.

This project trains and equips first responding vehicles such as fire trucks, police, and sheriff’s department cruisers with AEDs. Fire departments in rural Central Louisiana will receive the training and equipment. Currently, only about 15 percent of rural fire departments have AEDs. This effort will ensure that nearly 100 percent of rural first responders are equipped with AEDs and are trained to use them.

-more-

In addition to AED placement in first response vehicles, the American Heart Association and the Rapides Foundation plan to eventually place AEDs in schools, churches and other public places. Future plans also include expansion of the project to the remainder of the parishes in Central Louisiana. The devices are so easy to use that anyone trained in Heartsaver CPR (a four-hour course) can learn to operate one. The goal is to improve cardiac arrest survival rates in the United States by 20 percent, or 40,000 lives per year by 2010.

The project is part of the American Heart Association's nationwide Operation Heartbeat program, an initiative to strengthen the Chain of Survival – the four critical links in the emergency treatment of sudden cardiac arrest – and improve cardiac arrest survival. The critical links are early 911, early cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), early defibrillation (AEDs) and early advanced care.

According to the American Heart Association, about 700 Americans suffer from sudden cardiac arrest every day. More than 95 percent of these victims die, in many cases because defibrillators arrive on the scene too late, if at all.

“We know for a fact that every minute a person is in cardiac arrest, their chances of survival go down 10 percent,” says Emmanuel Witherspoon, M.D., co-chairman of Operation Heartbeat of Central Louisiana and an emergency room physician at Rapides Regional Medical Center in Alexandria. “If you live in a rural area, by the time an ambulance arrives, your time may have run out. If a first responder with an AED can get to you in just a few minutes, your chances of survival are still in the 60 to 70 percent range,” he says.

For more information about Operation Heartbeat, the AED project, call the Alexandria office of the American Heart Association at 318-443-7522.

###