

El Cerrito leads charge to make area 'HeartSafe'

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[Contra Costa Times](#)

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Quick response by trained personnel made the lifesaving difference after high school basketball player David Gurganious collapsed during a Feb. 2 game at El Cerrito High School.

An initiative announced Monday seeks to expand that type of response to all of West County through resuscitation training, awareness and the placement of defibrillators in as many locations as possible.

El Cerrito — at whose city hall Mayor Janet Abelson officially placed a portable defibrillator Monday — is the first city to sign on to the West County HeartSafe Community program; the city and county Supervisor John Gioia are challenging its counterparts to make a similar commitment.

Gurganious' collapse and resuscitation at El Cerrito High demonstrated the "Chain of Survival" needed to immediately help a heart attack victim. While others notified 911, Gurganious received CPR from his coach until medical personnel arrived six minutes later with a defibrillator.

Lawrence Gurganious said what happened to his 15-year-old son that night was "a horrifying situation for me and my family" that could have turned out far worse if not for the quick response.

The high school now has a defibrillator on campus, as do all middle and high schools in West County, thanks in part to the donation of eight units by the Chevron Richmond Refinery to the West Contra Costa Unified School District. Other units come from American Medical Response, which provides a set number of the \$1,500 to \$2,000 defibrillators to the county each year as part of its ambulance services contract.

Defibrillators also are in place at all high schools in the Mount Diablo Unified School District.

El Cerrito is now close to its goal of attaining HeartSafe certification with the placement of defibrillators at community facilities and an ongoing commitment to providing response training. El Sobrante and the West Contra Costa school district are also participating in the HeartSafe program.

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