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For immediate release

Johnson County makes strides strengthen a HeartSafe Community

Johnson County, Iowa – The Johnson County Board of Supervisors has officially proclaimed February as American Heart Month, reinforcing the County's commitment to cardiovascular health and life-saving emergency response initiatives.

Over 436,000 sudden cardiac arrests occur annually in the United States, with 90% of them being fatal. In Johnson County, a HeartSafe designated community by the Rotary-Kerber HeartSafe Community Campaign, widespread CPR training, increased access to Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs), and the adoption of the PulsePoint app have strengthened the County's response system to further prevent sudden cardiac arrests from becoming irreversible death.

During the Johnson County Board of Supervisors meeting on Jan. 30, Dr. Jim Merchant, chair of the Rotary-Kerber HeartSafe Community Campaign, was present to receive the proclamation and share a few remarks. "Supervisors, thank you for the proclamation. Thank you for your continued support for this campaign. I think you know that you have one of the best ambulance services in the country," he said. Merchant attributed much of the success to the leadership of Johnson County Ambulance Service Director, Fiona Johnson, who also attended the meeting.

With an initial $10,000 grant, the Rotary-Kerber HeartSafe Community Campaign, partnering with the Johnson County Ambulance Service and staffed by Rotary and other volunteers, was launched in 2019. Since then, Merchant said the campaign has had success with obtaining financial support from donors of about $50,000 per year, allowing the campaign to offer AED machines at an affordable cost to nonprofits and businesses in Johnson County. According to Merchant, the machines cost over $2,000 retail, but non-profits can buy them for $500, small businesses for $750, and large businesses with over 100 employees or more for $1,000 through the campaign's foundation.

In addition, the campaign has recently purchased mannequins that can be used as AED trainers and has donated them to the public libraries in Iowa City, North Liberty, and Coralville. The Johnson County Ambulance Service provides demonstrations for the public and those interested are encouraged to contact them for more information on how to attend.

Later this spring the campaign will begin with TV advertisements to ask the public to join the campaign, and they are putting energy into finding AEDs in the community that are not yet listed on a registry with a survey expected to go out soon. New locations of AEDs will be updated in the registry and in the PulsePoint app.

The PulsePoint app alerts subscribers when a cardiac emergency is happening in a nearby public vicinity. Community members who have had CPR training can assist with CPR until emergency services arrive on the scene. The app also directs these potential rescuers to the exact location of the closest AED and provides directions on how to conduct CPR and utilize the AED machines.

Members of the public are encouraged to download the PulsePoint app on Google Play or the Apple Store. To learn more about the Rotary-Kerber HeartSafe Community Campaign visit https://iowaheartsafe.org/. To learn more about how to access training and CPR classes, visit https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/department-of-ambulance.

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