

## Students learn to save lives



**Students learn to save lives.** County of Simcoe Paramedic Service director Andrew Robert (left) and ACT Foundation representative John Elliot watch how Bear Creek Secondary School students Emilie Pelka, 15, and Christopher Boucquey, 16, demonstrate how to use a public access defibrillator Friday. *Laurie Watt photo*

Laurie Watt, STAFF  
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BARRIE - Grade 9 teachers are passing on life-saving techniques as part of the physical education program thanks to the ACT Foundation.

The charitable foundation linked the County of Simcoe, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Elston Foundation, the Barrie Optimists and the TransCanada Corporation to introduce a CPR defibrillator training program in the region's 24 high schools.

Simcoe County Paramedic Services director Andrew Robert said the program, which will train more than 6,500 Grade 9 students each year, would make a critical difference.

"We know how big this is, how important the ACT Foundation program is," said Robert, who noted public access defibrillators (PADs) are in almost all area schools – and will be in all the region's schools shortly.

Training teachers to pass on the skills will improve response time – and survival for those experiencing a cardiac arrest, he added.

"The community has to be engaged to provide CPR and defibrillation. This program is the best example of that. Everyone can act to save a life, to be part of the chain of survival," he said.

Since introducing the PAD program a couple of years ago, Robert noted the county has trained 3,000 people. Adding 6,500 people each year –who feel confident in using the life-saving techniques and devices will dramatically increase effectiveness, he said.

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, early CPR and defibrillation can increase survival odds by 75 per cent.

Chances of survival decrease 10 per cent with every minute that passes without CPR or defibrillation. That reality inspired Prince of Wales Public School student Chase McEachern, 11, to lobby for PADs in every school and public building, after he collapsed. He died after a subsequent cardiac episode in 2006.

"His dream was to have PADs in all public places," said Simcoe County District School Board associate director Janis Medysky. "Can you imagine how happy Chase would be to know we have defibrillators in our schools and all young people will one day have training to use them?"

ACT Foundation representative John Elliot said the foundation – which wants to see CPR and defibrillation training in every secondary school in Canada – has already trained 1.7 million teens across Canada in more than 1,500 high schools.

Being prepared is key, he learned, when his stepfather collapsed over a year ago.

“It’s hard to imagine when you’re young when you’re going to need it. Imagine someone dying in front of you and being able to help,” he said. “It’s a gift to be able to give life.”

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