

Ex-firefighter credits squash players with saving his life

By Jake Courtepatte

The phrase "timing is everything" rings especially true when a life is on the line.

In Aurora resident Brian Johnson's case, he credits the quick actions of an off-duty nurse, firefighter, and police officer with being alive today.

On October 6 of last year, Johnson had just finished a game of squash at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex and was in the process of cooling down.

That's when he fell down "V.S.A." which, in medical terms, means "vital signs absent."

"I was dead on the floor," said Johnson. "I had no pulse, non-breathing."

Happening on a Monday, it just so happened that it was a league night the night of the incident, and on hand were the three people who would save his life.

Firefighter Brian Erskine, police officer Greg Payne, and pediatric nurse Branka Asadi immediately went to work over the new patient right there at the squash club.

"They were working on me within thirty seconds of me dropping to the floor."

Using the defibrillator at the complex, the trio were able to bring Johnson back with a few shocks.

He was then taken to Southlake Regional Health Centre, where he received a quadruple bypass a few days later.

Southlake's cardiac program is among the best in Canada, and Johnson knew that he was in good hands.

Johnson also knew that it was the quick timing and availability of medical experts on hand that saved his life that day.

Having retired almost two years ago, Johnson was actually a firefighter in Etobicoke for 31 years.

He had run "literally thousands" of medical calls over his career and says he never thought that he would be on the receiving end of a case.

"I've done all these calls over the years, but I've never realized the pain these guys were in until I experienced it myself. I wouldn't wish it on anyone."

Johnson spent nine days in the hospital before his release.

"It was a pretty fortunate event," said Johnson. "I've seen a lot of stats. I know that our success rate for something like that was about five percent."

Despite the low success rate, Johnson said it has nothing to do with a lack of effort or training, but rather the time frame in which the patient is attended to.

"If whoever is at the scene is able to start CPR, that's usually the defining difference."

Johnson also wishes to credit the Town of Aurora for keeping a working defibrillator on the wall in the complex amidst the construction going on.

Against all odds, Johnson came out of the ordeal without any heart damage. He hopes to be able to play squash again in six to nine

months.

Johnson will be presenting the three individuals he credits with saving his life with an appreciative plaque at Town Council next Tuesday, January 20.

"I couldn't have fallen into better hands," he said. "There's not much more you can say but thank you, so I just want to do something in recognition of what they did."