



Bob Roy, whose son Travis died of sudden cardiac arrest at Thompson Middle School in Murrieta, initiated a campaign for statewide awareness of the disease. At his home in De Luz, Roy displays a picture of his son and the portable defibrillator that Roy carries in his truck.

Murrieta student's death leads to observance

Efforts spur state to honor sudden cardiac arrest victims, survivors

By: JENNIFER KABBANY - Staff Writer

Today is Travis Roy's 16th birthday, but the De Luz teenager won't be blowing out candles or opening gifts. Travis died from sudden cardiac arrest a little more than a year ago.

Despite his passing, people across California today will remember Travis and countless others who have died from sudden cardiac arrest, as well as those who have survived, thanks in large part to the efforts of the boy's father, Bob Roy, and state Assemblyman Ray Haynes, R-Murrieta.

Today marks the inaugural "Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Day."

The statewide observance stems from a resolution sponsored by Haynes and unanimously passed by Sacramento lawmakers in late August. It serves as reminder that deaths from sudden cardiac arrest are frequent, and defibrillators ---- machines that can jolt a heart back to life ---- can help prevent those deaths.

"This is the starting point," said Roy, who contacted Haynes six months ago and said he was thankful at the speed in which the resolution came about. "It opens the door to start an awareness campaign. The main thing is to get the word out about how deadly sudden cardiac arrest is."

Sudden cardiac arrest is one of the leading causes of death in the country, as more Americans die each year from it than from cancer and car

crashes combined, according to the resolution.

Bob Roy began devoting his time to teaching about the dangers of sudden cardiac arrest and the importance of having defibrillators at schools after Travis Roy died in June 2005 at the age of 14.

About a month before Travis died, he had been playing outside at Thompson Middle School in Murrieta and suffered a cardiac arrest due to a previously undiagnosed heart condition, his father said.

Despite a quick response from school and medical officials, it took 23 minutes before Travis received an electric shock from a defibrillator that restarted his heart and brought him back to life, though in a coma, Bob Roy said.

That 23 minutes was the difference, he said. Had Travis been brought back to life sooner with the electric shock, he may have lived, but the delay left Travis in a coma until his death, he said.

"When you lose a child, I am not sure you ever recover from it," said Diana Roy, Travis' mother.

After Travis' death, Murrieta Valley Unified School District trustees agreed to buy defibrillators for its middle and high schools. The Murrieta Valley Council PTA is also working to raise money to buy the devices for all of the district's elementary schools, said Trustee Kris Thomasian.

"What (Bob Roy) has done is very inspirational and a real tribute to his son," Thomasian said. "It's amazing the effort he has undertaken to ensure that no other family has to go through what his did."

Bob Roy said he hopes other school districts follow Murrieta's lead.

About 3,000 to 5,000 children die each year from sudden cardiac arrest, and one out of every 100,000 to 300,000 high school athletes will die each year from sudden cardiac arrest, the resolution states. State law already requires defibrillators in gyms, and federal law requires them in airplanes.

Haynes could not be reached for comment Friday or Monday. The resolution states that education and a heightened public awareness of how critical time is in providing treatment to sudden cardiac arrest victims can help save lives.

Bob Roy said the resolution does not define how schools should recognize the day, nor mandate that schools purchase defibrillators. He said he just hopes it can help save lives through education.

"It gets us into schools," Bob Roy said. "Once people learn about it, they'll want something done."

Today, Roy will tell his family's story at the Rose Bowl prior to a commemorative 5K run in honor of Pasadena Police Officer Kyle Ballard, who died last year at the age of 30 from sudden cardiac arrest.

Roy said this time next year there will be more events and commemorations planned, and that he never expected his efforts working with Sacramento lawmakers to bear fruit so quickly.

"It's been a roller coaster for the entire family," he said. Roy can be reached at broy@fadv.com.

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