

Students Receive EKG Screenings Courtesy of The Max Schewitz Foundation

Nearly 1,200 Libertyville High School students received free electrocardiogram (EKG) tests as part of a program held Thursday, Feb. 28 at the school. Sponsored by The Max Schewitz Foundation, the program's goal is to help reduce the number of young adults who die from sudden cardiac death.

The Max Schewitz Foundation, in collaboration with the Midwest Heart Foundation, coordinated the tests at LHS. Midwest Heart Foundation created the Young Hearts for Life™ Cardiac Screening Program to identify students at-risk of sudden cardiac death and to increase the public awareness of this issue. To date, Midwest Heart Foundation has screened over 14,000 students in several DuPage County high schools. LHS is the second Lake County school offered free EKG testing sponsored by the Max Schewitz Foundation. Lake Forest High School students were tested last September.

Max Schewitz, of Lake Bluff, died in September 2005 at the age of 20 from sudden cardiac arrhythmia, having shown no prior signs of a heart disorder. In 2006, Dr. David and Mary Beth Schewitz, Max's parents, created the Max Schewitz Foundation which works for two causes- to protect threatened reptile species, which was a passion of Max's, and to help prevent the death of young adults due to sudden cardiac events.

Parents also helped make the program a success. Approximately 100 LHS parent volunteers were trained and supervised in using the EKG machines by Midwest Heart Foundation staff, and all test results were reviewed onsite by cardiologists.

According to Dr. Joseph Marek, clinical cardiologist and medical director for the Young Hearts for Life Cardiac Screening Program, six young adults die suddenly each week from undiagnosed cardiac problems in the United States. EKG tests can help identify students with Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy, or HCM. HCM is a genetic abnormality that enlarges the left ventricle of the heart, which can trigger fatal heart-rhythm disturbances particularly during exercise. HCM is the most common cause of sudden death in young adults. Approximately one in 500 people are estimated to have the abnormality, Marek added. "In most cases an EKG can detect young adults who are at risk for sudden cardiac death," Marek said.

LHS Principal Brad Swanson said the school is excited to be able to offer the EKG program to students. "We are very impressed with the passion and commitment for the event from the Schewitz Foundation," he said. "This is also evidence of a great team effort, as this screening relies on the generous volunteering efforts of our parents. In the end, all our students will benefit from this important health screening."