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Mechanic Matthew Johnson (center) visits with his lifesaving crew: From left Mechanic Chris Kane, Haidook "Duke" Arakelian, Mechanic Leader Dave Sweany, Mechanics Bill Heiller and Dawn Diggs, Service Attendant Alfredo Tardencilla, and Equipment Maintenance Supervisor Jagath Wijegunawardena. *Photos by Laura Kloth*

Div. 8 Mechanic Matt Johnson Thanks Co-workers for Saving his Life

- Johnson is second employee in recent weeks to suffer a heart attack while at work.

By Laura Kloth

Staff Writer

(June 29, 2010) Just after arriving for a routine day of work on May 19, Div. 8 Mechanic Matt Johnson went into full cardiac arrest.

He survived thanks in no small part to a quick-thinking crew of fellow mechanics and supervisors who worked together to revive and care for him keeping him alive before paramedics arrived.

The day started as any other with Johnson taking his daily four mile bike ride to work. Greeted by co-worker Mechanic Haidook "Duke" Arakelian, he remembered greeting Arakelian and suddenly, "I just fell over flat on my back just like that."

A little more than four weeks later, Johnson was happy to pay a visit, thanking his rescuers at the busy division in Chatsworth, and recalling the life-altering event.

"If you made a list of people who might have a heart condition, I don't think I was very high on the list. So it surprised a lot of people that I had a heart attack," Johnson said, indicating that he doesn't smoke, rides his

bike as often as he can and never had any health-related warning signs before the incident.

Ironically, Arakelian, who became the first responder, had not been expected to begin his shift until 6:30 a.m., but that day he happened to arrive a half hour early, recalled Equipment Maintenance Supervisor Jagath Wijegunawardena.

Realizing what was happening; Arakelian began yelling for help and quickly began CPR on Johnson.

By this time, Mechanic Dawn Diggs happened to be walking by and noticed the commotion. She ran "full tilt" toward the shop yelling, "Someone please call 911 immediately, Matt is not breathing."

"I heard Dawn from the shop office so I ran over there right away and checked Matt out... He wasn't breathing and had no heartbeat," said "Mechanic Leader Dave Sweany.

After a cell phone failed to connect, Arakelian turned over applying chest compressions to Master Mechanic Leader Bill Heiller while Wijegunawardena grabbed the office landline to call 911. He was turning purple not getting better, Sweany remembered.



Div. 8 Mechanic Leader Dave Sweany used the lifesaving defibrillator (AED) to help revive friend and coworker Matt Johnson.

Sweany said he had a quick flashback to a first-aid class where he learned how to operate Automated External Defibrillator (AED). Running back Grabbing the device from the shop office, Sweany and Mechanic Chris Kane, a former EMT, prepped Johnson for the shock.

"This was the very first time that I opened this up," said Sweany, remembering that he quickly scanned through the instructions and step-by-step pictures before pushing the button on the AED.

"The machine analyzed there was no heartbeat. It charged up and he jumped," Sweany said. "He just jolted."

Diggs remembers jumping into a utility truck to meet the responding fire trucks. "I drove down to the front of the division. I stood in the middle of the street waving my vest to guide them," Diggs said.

Kane said Johnson seemed to be responding before paramedics arrived to transport him to the hospital.

Johnson remembered regaining consciousness at the hospital.

"It was terror and panic when I woke up. I didn't know what happened. I didn't know if there was an earthquake. I got hit in the head or what. I was disoriented," he said.

Johnson was taken immediately into surgery where surgeons inserted a stent into his heart after discovering that his left marginal artery was 95 percent blocked.

Later, Kane said no one was more surprised by the incident than he was.

"I know Matt. We go camping. We go riding together. He's an athlete. The guy rides hundreds of miles a week. He'd be the last person you would think to have a heart attack," said Kane.

Johnson spent four days in the hospital and said he expects to return to work in about a month, joking that he had plenty of vacation time available but never expected to use it this way.

His coworkers laughed and talked about how happy they were to see him up riding his bike again and recovering so "amazingly" well.

"It was like clockwork. Everything just happened in the right amount of time," Diggs said.

Matt Johnson is the second Metro employee to suffer a heart attack on the job this year.

In April, Div. 1 [Bus Operator William Bonney](#) suffered a major attack and his coworkers were commended for their rescue efforts as Maintenance Manager John McBryan praised the teamwork and shared the lesson learned from the experience.

"This is a good message that Mr. Bonney has given us: Start taking care of yourself."