

Lee Memorial upgrades Cardiac Decision Unit

\$250,000 gift buys new equipment

BY MICHELLE L. START
Florida Weekly Correspondent

One third of Lee County's deaths every year are attributed to heart disease.

Although lower than the national rate of 42 percent, it is still a number that concerns local medical officials.

They're hoping a \$250,000 donation from Lex and Eileen Roulston to the Heart & Vascular Institute Cardiac Decision Unit will further reduce that number.

The money will be used to purchase new equipment and strengthen existing facilities. As a part of the donation, the unit was renamed after the Roulstons.

"The beauty of the cardiac decision unit is that is where it all begins," said Sharon MacDonald, chief foundation officer at Lee Memorial Health System.

Lex Roulston is a former executive with Johnson & Johnson, a foundation board member and founder of South Fort Myers' chapter of a national organization called "Mended Hearts."

He suffered a heart attack and was treated in the cardiac decision unit before undergoing a quintuple bypass.

Patients in the unit are treated for a variety of cardiac conditions including chest pain, unstable angina, new onset heart arrhythmias and congestive heart failure in the 16-bed unit. They are also admitted for outpatient observation and may receive diagnostic testing. More than 4,200 patients are treated annually in the unit.

"I know the quality of care I received here at HealthPark and the irreplaceable gift of time that was given to me by the staff," Lex Roulston said. "Eileen and I are so grateful for the care I received and we wanted to provide that excellence to others who are suffering."

Heart disease affects both sexes through all age groups, said Donna Giannuzzi, chief nursing officer at Lee Memorial Health System.

In 2005, the most recent year where data is available, 1,683 of Lee County's 5,736 deaths were attributed to heart disease, according

to the Florida Department of Health. That works out to be roughly 29 percent of the deaths. It is a number that fluctuates slightly from year to year, but still works out to be about one-third of all deaths.

"Time is significant if you are having chest pain that is a potential heart attack," said Giannuzzi. "You don't want to lose heart muscle."

When a patient goes to the emergency room, physicians determine the risk for heart attacks. Low and mid risk patients are sent to the cardiac decision unit, where tests are run and they are monitored.

"We do diagnostic testing pretty rapidly to see if there is any heart disease," said Giannuzzi. "Usually, they come in with a non-descript chest pain or they won't have any of the symptoms, but the pain is pretty bad."

For Giannuzzi's mom, her pain was in her ear during a heart attack 10 years ago. Others feel it in the arms or along their jaw bones.

Giannuzzi said if a patient is feeling any of these pains, they ought to call 911. Do not try



to drive yourself or have anyone else drive you to the hospital, she said. The ambulances respond quicker and have equipment on board to treat patients should the situation turn worse. ■

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Signs of a Heart Attack

- >> Chest discomfort.
- >> Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.
- >> Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort.
- >> Other signs may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.
- >> As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

Cardiac arrest strikes symptoms

- >> Sudden loss of responsiveness (no response to tapping on shoulders).
- >> No normal breathing (the victim does not take a normal breath when you tilt the head up and check for at least five seconds).

Source: American Heart Association

Stroke Warning Signs

- >> Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- >> Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- >> Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- >> Sudden, severe headache with no known cause
- >> Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body

Source: The American Stroke Association

Lee County heart-related deaths

Percentage of all Lee County deaths attributed to heart disease by year:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| >> 1996: 34 percent | >> 2001: 32 percent |
| >> 1997: 34 percent | >> 2002: 30 percent |
| >> 1998: 34 percent | >> 2003: 31 percent |
| >> 1999: 32 percent | >> 2004: 32 percent |
| >> 2000: 41 percent | >> 2005: 29 percent |

Source: Florida Department of Health

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