OUTDOORS

Defibrillator availability increasing at area golf courses

andyHALL
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Having recently completed a Red Cross CPR/AED/First Aid course, I quickly learned several interesting truths. Administering cardio pulmonary resuscitation, CPR, on a mannequin is easy, but sustaining it for a long duration it is hard. More illuminating, is the availability of an automated external defibrillator, or AED, at golf courses has increased dramatically since the first commercial devices began appearing a decade ago.

Despite anecdotal comments regarding lightening strikes and alligator attacks, sudden cardiac arrest clearly remains the number one killer on Florida golf courses, where expansive links and sometimes remote locations can hinder accessibility and delay timely emergency response for golfers in need.

Kelly Forrest my Red Cross instructor, an enthusiastic and irascible emergency medical technician, pointed out that every minute your heart does not beat reduces your odds of survival by about 10 percent. However, local golf courses like many across the country are now able to render timely aid with their own AED, hopefully extending the window of life until emergency care arrives.

Let's be honest, the average golfer in our area meets the target population most at risk for heart attack. The average age of a sudden-cardiac-arrest victim is 65, though some are stricken as early as their 30s or 40s. Studies show that heart attacks most frequently occur in the morning, precisely when most of us play a typical round in four hours, often several times a week.

The American Heart Association indicates, "50,000 lives could be saved each year if defibrillators were more widely available at sites where sudden cardiac arrest frequently occurs." Studies have indicated that, with early defibrillation, chances for survival rise from 5 percent to as high as 45 percent.

In our area, Lee County Public Safety coordinates with first responder agencies in the community, including law enforcement, fire districts and municipal fire departments, lifeguards, and other volunteer organizations that render on-scene patient care before emergency medical technicians or paramedics arrive. This effort includes assuring the first responders have prompt access to the location of any AED's, along with setting minimum standards for use, training, data collection and data recovery for the program.

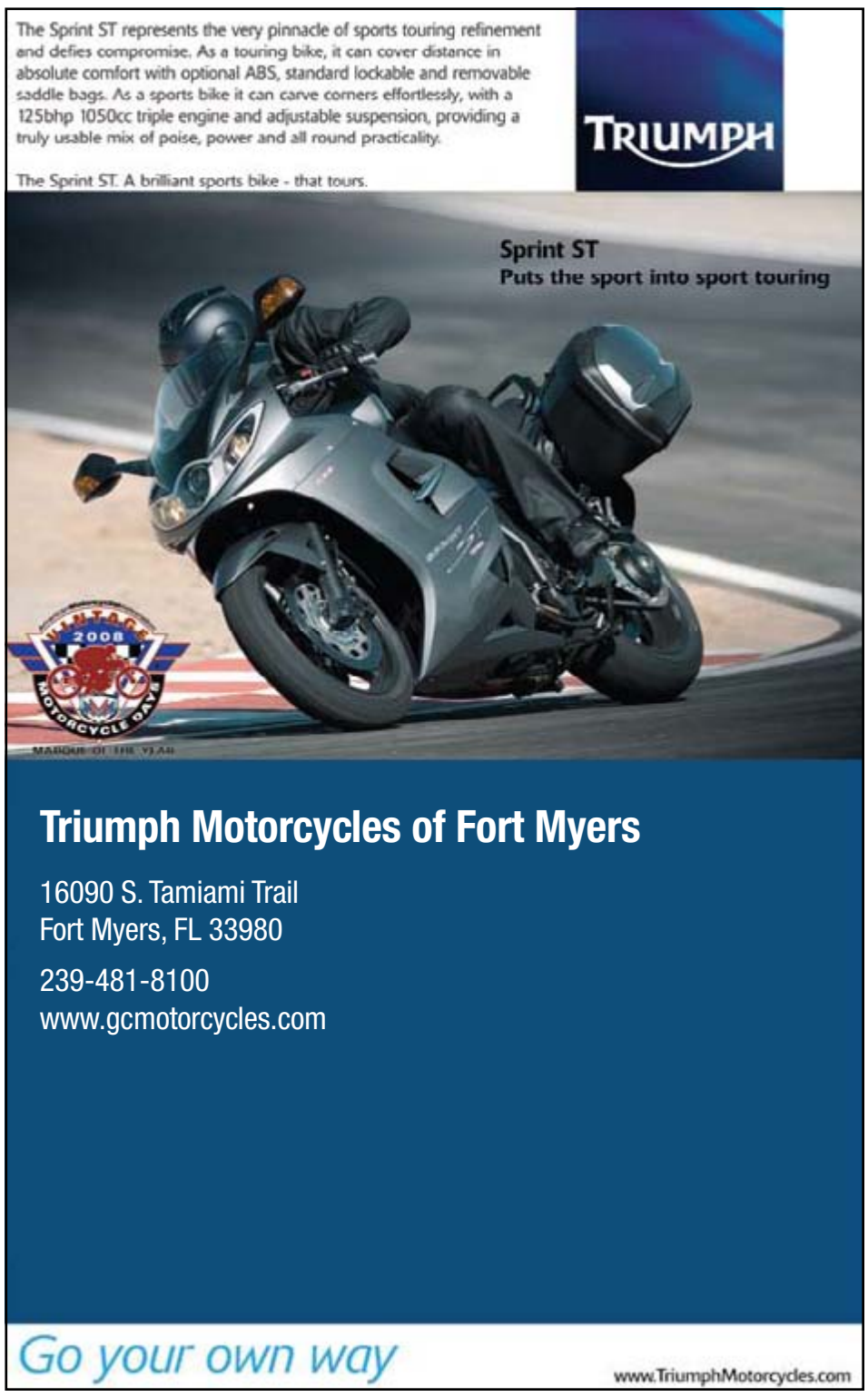
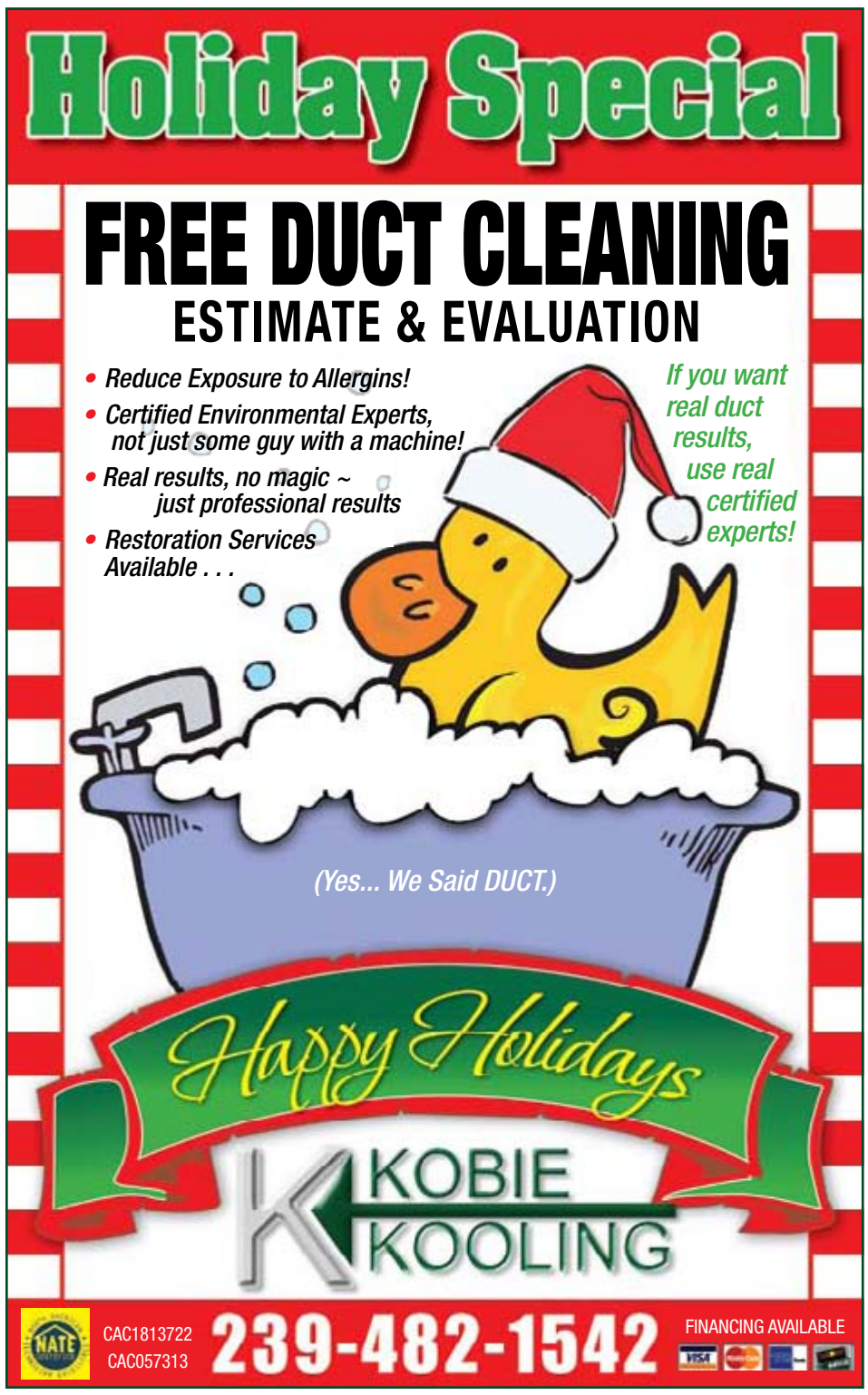
COURTESY PHOTO

Tom Hurst (left) and Steve DiMattio, employees at Copperleaf Golf Club, are trained as first responders in CPR and automated external defibrillator operation.

According to a list on the Lee County, Florida Public EMS education website (http://internet.lee-ems.com/education/leeaed.cfm), we currently have over 50 golf courses in Lee County that have trained CPR/AED personnel onsite to aid members and patrons.

More importantly, organizations desiring to establish a public access AED program can do so by: training designated rescuers in CPR and AED use, maintaining physician oversight to ensure quality control, integrating with the local EMS system, and using and maintaining AED's according to the manufacturer's specifications. Once the criteria is met, the organization becomes part of Lee County's public access AED program.

Some individuals or organizations catering to the public may worry that the actions of their employees or agents may make them legally liable if they render early assistance to victims, especially if it's unsuccessful. On the contrary, a quick search of the internet reveals a number of law firms seeking parties injured due to lack of assistance at sites with public access.

Today, all 50 states have enacted Good Samaritan laws that give legal protection to those providing emergency care to an ill or injured person without accepting anything in return. These laws differ from state to state, but typically protect citizens acting the same way a "reasonable and prudent person" would if that person were in the same situation.

Most golfers appreciate any assistance they can get, especially if it extends the round into extra holes and allows them an opportunity to be a winner. ■