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Spring Branch high schools to get portable defibrillators

By ANNETTE BAIRD

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All six high schools in the Spring Branch school district will have portable defibrillators thanks to a gift from a family who lost their 24-year-old daughter to a sudden heart attack.

The VanCronkhite family raised funds through Courtney's Crusade, a charitable organization they set up named in memory of their daughter. They were able to buy six automated external defibrillators, worth \$14,400, and donated them to the school district at a special presentation Monday night at the January board of trustees meeting.

Courtney died in August 1999 from a rare disease that affects the electrical system of the heart. She suffered a sudden cardiac arrest in the early hours of Aug. 9, and though paramedics were able to restore her heartbeat, she died the next day because she had initially been without a heartbeat for eight minutes.

Courtney's identical twin sister Kindel said she hopes the devices, to be installed at Memorial, Stratford, Spring Woods and Northbrook high schools, Westchester Academy and the School of Choice, will help prevent this kind of tragedy from happening to other families.

For more information about the organization, visit the Web site at www.courtneyscrusade.com.

It was a night of special presentations all around.

The Spring Branch Education Foundation presented checks totaling more than \$500,000 to the district, groups and individuals.

Among them were the Parent Teacher Association, which received \$7,000, and Linda Reed, assistant superintendent for school improvement and support, who received \$100,000 to go towards instruction. The district received more than \$360,000.

The foundation was established in 1993 to develop voluntary financial support for district programs designed to bring about significant gains in student academic performance.

Trustees recognized brothers Khaled and Karim El-Kassir, a second-grader and third-grader respectively at **Pine Shadows Elementary School**. Each boy won a scholarship worth \$500 from the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented.

Their mother Patricia El-Kassir, a physics teacher for the gifted and talented at Pine Shadows, was among the more than 50 teachers across the district who were awarded grants through the

J. Landon Short Mini-Grants for Educators. Amounts of up to \$300 were given to teachers through the 14-year-old program set up in memory of J. Landon Short, a founding member on the district's partners in education board. Endowment funding for the program is provided by The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation.

Joe Kolenda, director of the Guthrie Center, was named employee of the month, and Shirley Alkek, who volunteers at Spring Branch Elementary School, was named volunteer of the month.

At the meeting, trustees approved the annual financial report for the year ending Aug. 31, 2003, and a resolution of annual review of the districts investment policy. Trustees also approved the date of May 15 for school board elections.

Two items on the agenda were withdrawn for continued discussion. They included awarding of bids for the construction and renovation projects at Memorial and Stratford high schools. Trustees also wanted to hold off on a decision to award a contract worth \$113,000 for technology consulting to M&A Technology's Professional Services Group.

The district wants to hire the group to help implement a technology plan, assess the district's entire network system and renegotiate technology contracts.

The district has to come up with a plan by April 1, when the existing technology program comes to an end.

Both Theresa Kosmoski and Susan Kellner said they wanted to see a full report on what the group would be doing before they voted.

The item is expected to come up for discussion at an upcoming workshop.