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Saving a Life in Orinda

By Cathy Dausman



Barry and Allison Schneider are two of three people who will be honored June 4. The third, Julie Gavigan, was camera-shy. Photo Cathy Dausman

Barry Schneider and his daughter Allison recently completed a father-daughter bonding experience so intense that Schneider described it simply as "not on his list" - they saved a life using CPR. The pair, along with employee Julie Gavigan, will be honored by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and Orinda City Council on June 4.

The meeting coincides with National CPR and AED Awareness Week, said MOFD division chief Darrell Lee. Schneider, who calls himself as "a trainer and jack of all trades," and his daughter were at work at Orinda's In Forma Integral Fitness gym last month when Allison Schneider noticed a member collapsed face first on the ground. "I ran over and rolled him onto his side," she said.

The victim, an elderly man who regularly trains there, was barely conscious, his respiration rough and infrequent and he was not responding to questions. His obviously shaken wife was standing nearby.

Gavigan remained at the front desk to make the 911 call. "Allison and I both looked at each other and started team CPR," the elder Schneider said. "I started [chest] massage and Allison started [rescue] breathing." This was not an experience likely to leave anyone with "a warm fuzzy feeling," Schneider explained. Still, "everybody was completely engaged and doing exactly what they should be doing," he said.

The pair continued to work on the victim until MOFD personnel arrived, took over and transported the victim to the hospital where he was treated and later released. He is recovering at home, with no apparent loss of function or memory.

When the paramedics left, Barry Schneider closed the gym and drove home, stopping at Briones Regional Park to sit under a tree for half an hour. Allison Schneider headed "to the Berkeley Y" where she swam laps to gain control of her nerves. Although the younger Schneider had never performed CPR on a real victim before, she remained "cool, calm and very focused on her task," according to her father. "She was truly, truly extraordinary...much older than her years," he said with pride.

Allison Schneider said she wants to pursue a career in health care, perhaps as a physician's assistant. Meanwhile, this summer she'll work as a counselor at Boy Scout Camp Wolfboro where she will remind the scouts how important it is to learn CPR. She'll tell them, "This isn't fun, this is serious."

"I've always known [Allison] was going to do good things," said her dad. "She is so passionate about helping people."

For more information on the National CPR and AED Awareness Week go to <http://tinyurl.com/r9fr46> (on the American Red Cross website). "I encourage all residents of Contra Costa County to learn critical lifesaving skills such as CPR and AED use," said Lee. He'd also like to see the Lamorinda communities become HeartSafe Communities (<http://heartsafe-community.org>).

Reach the reporter at: cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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