Living to Serve: Kevin Crowe’s Life Sparks a Quiet Revolution in Somerset, Kentucky

At 17 years of age, Kevin Crowe had everything going for him: a loving family, many friends, an outstanding record as an athlete with the cross country and track and field teams, a new appointment as regional president of the Future Farmers of America (FFA), and active participation in the agricultural department at Southwestern Pulaski High School. Others describe him as a good, popular and focused person. His plans were to attend college and return to the farm that’s been in his father Gerald’s family for three generations. His mother Libbey said that his life exemplified the FFA national motto:

Learning to do,
Doing to learn,
Earning to live,
Living to serve.

That all changed on April 9, 2004, when after playing a game of ultimate Frisbee in physical education class, Kevin asked his teacher if he could sit down. When the teacher asked Kevin if he was all right, he said he just needed to sit down for a minute, and then slumped over. Those present called 9-1-1 and the school nurse performed CPR until the ambulance arrived. Kevin was transported to the local hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Doctors believe Kevin passed away because of sudden cardiac arrest, a condition in which the electrical functioning of the heart short circuits, causing the heart to stop beating, resulting in cardiovascular collapse—also known as “sudden cardiac death.” Had an automated external defibrillator (AED) been immediately available at the school, it is possible Kevin might be alive today.

A Legacy for Kentucky and a Vision for the Nation

Somerset citizens hope their town can be a model for Kentucky and their state a model for the nation. Tim Eaton, Pulaski superintendent of schools, is chairman of a superintendents’ co-op involving 24 districts in southeast Kentucky. He shared the Somerset story with the membership, hoping that more schools will implement AED programs. In addition, a video featuring Kevin’s mother and others is being made available to each school in the co-op. “Twenty-four school districts is a giant leap into getting the word out,” he said. “This effort is sweeping the state in waves,” he said, referring to a recent article in the Kentucky PTA newsletter highlighting the effort.

Wilson Sears, superintendent of Somerset Independent Schools, is carving further inroads. Sears, coached in the state for 20 years, and served as president of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association. He issued an “unofficial challenge” to the group that the home school makes sure a defibrillator is present during athletic events. “There are issues,” he said. "We still have to prioritize where the AEDs are going to be—at the football game or the golf tournament or the basketball game? Multiple events can be going on at the same time. If the home team agrees to provide the AED, there is one when you get there.”

The effort has also provided an AED to the local EMS for the monthly Somernites Cruise, a heavily attended auto show that makes getting a defibrillator to a victim by ambulance difficult. The AED will be easy to carry on the golf carts the EMS team uses for the event.

"The support has been almost overwhelming," Tammy Price said. "We are a small town. If we can do it, anybody can do it. You just have to have the fortitude to tackle the project."

Libbey Crowe said, "We’re hoping to make a positive out of a tragedy in our community. We want to help prevent another tragedy. It’s astounding and amazing that all this has happened, and to see what the community has done. You just can’t explain it. Kevin would be so proud, to know that so many people have reached out to carry on a legacy.”

NOTE: AEDs are prescription devices. AED users should be trained in CPR and use of the AED. Please consult your physician. Although not everyone can be saved from sudden cardiac arrest, studies show that survival rates can be dramatically improved with early defibrillation. For more information, please call 1.800.442.1142 or visit www.medtronic-ers.com
A Stunned Community Mobilizes into Action

It all started when Dr. Joe Wiegel, an internist in Somerset, wrote a letter to the editor of The Commonwealth Journal. Libby Crowe has been his receptionist and administrative assistant for the last 20 years. In his letter he explained to the stunned community what had happened to Kevin medically offered comfort, and encouraged people locally and across the state to urge local school boards to place AEDs in schools. He explained, "AEDs have become widely available over the course of the last several years and have become relatively inexpensive and easy for lay people to use." He expressed the hope that "we can give further meaning to Kevin's death and make something truly positive come from this..."

Kevin's family knew he had many friends, but didn't fully realize how many people Kevin touched in his young life. "We asked the kids to dress in their FFA and track jackets for the funeral," Libby Crowe said. "Kids came from everywhere. You could see a sea of blue, the FFA jackets, and then the blue, purple and maroon jackets of the track and cross country teams." The outpouring of support didn't end that day. It has sparked a quiet revolution with the hard-hitting jackets of the track and cross country teams." The caring in their schools yet another unfunded worthy cause, and made an action plan. The school system selected the vendor. Our local EMS wanted a system that would be compatible with their defibrillators. Then I sat down with the phone book and began calling people in the medical community and businesses, focusing on manufacturing, banks, car dealerships, trucking and dentists. We also talked to small business owners and local civic groups.

"I'd call and say, "Hi, I'm Tammy Price with GE. Did you see the article about the young man who died?" If they hadn't seen it, I'd fax them the article. We asked larger businesses to give a unit, and the dentists and lending institutions to give a minimum of $100 each. Some gave more, some less, than what we asked. We set up an account at a local bank to manage all the funds. We got the local news media involved."

A longtime Somerset resident, Price said that people who had never met wrote out personal checks. "I was the point person between the bank, the community and the newspaper, Price said. "Paul Merz and I kept the superintendents in the loop at every step." When asked about the most difficult aspect of the project, Merz replied, "It's not that hard. It's harder for the Crowes. They lost a child."

Planning and Implementing Somerset's School AED Program

No one was quite prepared for the level of community response. Within three weeks the effort had achieved all financial commitments necessary to place AEDs in every school in Pulaski County. All the checks were in within four to eight weeks. The town of about 50,000 people raised more than $50,000. The AED program encompasses three school districts, Pulaski, Somerset and Science Hill, and by the time schools opened in mid-August, offered an additional layer of defense in the event someone else—a student, teacher or family member—succumbs to sudden cardiac arrest. Each high school has three AEDs, while each elementary, middle and private school has one. A total of 10,122 students will have an AED on-site in their schools. Pulaski County-7,800, Somerset Independent-1,562, Science Hill-501, Saline Christian-91, and Somerset Christian-200.

Community supporters knew that an AED program involves more than buying devices: it also requires a carefully organized AED plan, in collaboration with the local emergency services department (EMS). Merz pointed out, "If a person goes down in a game after school hours, you want the EMS to be able to tell someone exactly where the AED is, within minutes."

LifeServers, Inc., an authorized distributor for Medtronic Emergency Response Systems based in Louisville, helped the schools plan for the number of defibrillators to order, helped build community awareness, obtained medical authorization from physicians, coordinated all efforts with the local EMS, and assisted with AED policies and procedures. "The people of Somerset are good people with big hearts," said Peggy Weber, Kentucky commercial sales consultant for LifeServers. "We know how important it is for AEDs to be visible and accessible when needed, not locked up somewhere. Wall cabinets allow them to be easily seen and used when needed."

Each wall cabinet will have an engraved placard in memory of Kevin Crowe, and acknowledging the donor.

James Gibson is a major with Somerset Fire/EMS and owner of Edu-Tech Services, Inc., the agency providing CPR and AED training throughout the county. Gibson, who knew Kevin as a child, is donating his time to provide hours of training to hundreds of people. In Pulaski County schools alone, close to 200 people have been trained. The Somerset and independent schools will boost that number even higher. "It's hard for James, too," said Libby Crowe, "because he knew Kevin since he was small. He spends every training session by making a few remarks in Kevin's memory." Kotey, Kevin's 13-year-old sister, has already received her CPR and AED certification.

Gibson notes that emergency response teams in the area carry LIFEPAK® defibrillators. EMS emphasized the importance of compatibility when making the AED purchases. Because LIFEPAK® AEDs enable the cable to be unplugged from the adhesive electrode pad on the victim’s chest and easily plugged into the EMS team’s more advanced LIFEPAK® device, they help save precious seconds. "The community was very receptive to this idea," Gibson said. "Somerset citizens decided to purchase LIFEPAK CR Plus defibrillators."
A Stunned Community Mobilizes into Action

It all started when Dr. Joe Weigel, an internist in Somerset, wrote a letter to the editor of The Commonwealth Journal. Libby Crowe has been his receptionist and administrative assistant for the last 20 years. In his letter he explained to the stunned community what had happened to Kevin. He felt medically offered comfort, and encouraged people locally and across the state to urge local school boards to place AEDs in schools. He explained, “AEDs have become widely available over the course of the last several years and have become relatively inexpensive and easy for lay people to use.” He expressed the hope that “we can give further meaning to Kevin’s death and make something truly positive come from this…”

Kevin’s family knew he had many friends, but didn’t fully realize how many people Kevin touched in his young life. “We asked the kids to dress in their FFA and track jackets for the funeral,” Libby Crowe said. “Kids came from everywhere. You could see a sea of blue, the FFA jackets, and then the blue, purple and maroon jackets of the track and cross country teams.” The outpouring of support didn’t end that day. It has spurred a quiet revolution with the hard-hitting goal that no one has to go through this again.

As the effort got underway, Merz “did the talking,” making presentations to the Somerset Chamber of Commerce and the local Rotary and Kiwanis clubs. The only possible barrier he found was lack of understanding about AEDs. “You’ve got to get people to start saying fire extinguisher and AED in the same sentence,” he said. In Merz’s first presentation to the Chamber, the CEO of the local hospital stood up and pledged to contribute two AEDs.

“From then on, it was a whirlwind,” said Merz’s colleague, Tammy Price, human resources manager at GE Somerset. “We make glasses, we’re not medical people. We just decided this is a worthy cause, and made an action plan. The school system selected the vendor. Our local EMS wanted a system that would be compatible with their defibrillators. Then I sat down with the phone book and began calling people in the medical community and businesses, focusing on manufacturing, banks, car dealerships, trucking and dentists. We also talked to small business owners and local civic groups.

“I’d call and say, ‘Hi, I’m Tammy Price with GE. Did you see the article about the young man who died?’ If they hadn’t seen it, I’d fax them the article. We asked larger businesses to give a unit, and the dentists and lending institutions to give a minimum of $100 each. Some gave more, some less, than what we asked. We set up an account at a local bank to manage all the funds. We got the local news media involved.”

A longtime Somerset resident, Price said that people she had never met wrote out personal checks. “I was the point person between the bank, the community and the newspaper, Price said. “Weber, Kentucky commercial sales consultant for Medtronic Emergency Response Systems LifeServers, Inc., an authorized distributor for Medtronic Emergency Response Systems based in Louisville, helped the schools plan for the number of defibrillators to order, helped build community awareness, obtained medical authorization from physicians, coordinated all efforts with the local EMS, and assisted with AED policies and procedures. “The people of Somerset are good people with big hearts,” said Peggy Weber, Kentucky commercial sales consultant for LifeServers. “We know how important it is for AEDs to be visible and accessible when needed, not locked up somewhere. Wall cabinets allow them to be easily seen and used when needed.”

Planning and Implementing Somerset’s School AED Program

No one was quite prepared for the level of community response. Within three weeks the effort had achieved all financial commitments necessary to place AEDs in every school in Pulaski County. All the checks were in within four to eight weeks. The town of about 50,000 people raised more than $50,000. The AED program encompasses three school districts, Pulaski, Somerset and Science Hill, and by the time schools opened in mid-August, offered an additional layer of defense in the event someone else—a student, teacher or family member—succumbs to sudden cardiac arrest. Each high school has three AEDs, while each elementary, middle and private school has one. A total of 10,122 students will have an AED on-site in their schools. Pulaski County-7,800, Somerset Independent-1,562, Science Hill-50, Saline Christian-91, and Somerset Christian-200.

Community supporters knew that an AED program involves more than buying devices: it also requires a carefully organized AED plan, in collaboration with the local emergency services department (EMS). Merz pointed out, “If a person goes down in a game after school hours, you want the EMS to be able to tell someone exactly where the AED is, within minutes.”

“From then on, it was a whirlwind,” said Merz’s colleague, Tammy Price, human resources manager at GE Somerset. “We make glasses, we’re not medical people. We just decided this is a worthy cause, and made an action plan. The school system selected the vendor. Our local EMS wanted a system that would be compatible with their defibrillators. Then I sat down with the phone book and began calling people in the medical community and businesses, focusing on manufacturing, banks, car dealerships, trucking and dentists. We also talked to small business owners and local civic groups.

“I’d call and say, ‘Hi, I’m Tammy Price with GE. Did you see the article about the young man who died?’ If they hadn’t seen it, I’d fax them the article. We asked larger businesses to give a unit, and the dentists and lending institutions to give a minimum of $100 each. Some gave more, some less, than what we asked. We set up an account at a local bank to manage all the funds. We got the local news media involved.”

A longtime Somerset resident, Price said that people she had never met wrote out personal checks. “I was the point person between the bank, the community and the newspaper, Price said. “Paul Merz and I kept the superintendents in the loop at every step.” When asked about the most difficult aspect of the project, Merz replied, “It’s not that hard. It’s harder for the Crowes. They lost a child.”

Kevin Crowe had an outstanding record as an athlete with the cross country and track and field teams. Each wall cabinet will have an engraved placard in memory of Kevin Crowe, and acknowledging the donor.

Paul Merz, plant manager of General Electric Somerset Glass Plant, saw the effect that Kevin’s death had on his daughter, Michele. He did not know Kevin, but his daughter and Kevin were in FFA together. Impressed by the compassionate comforting Libby Crowe offered Merz’s daughter and other youths, Merz wrote a response to Dr. Weigel’s letter. Supporting Weigel’s urgency about the importance of AEDs in schools, he challenged parents, grandparents and relatives to fund the AEDs rather than giving the local schools yet another unfunded mandate. He also announced that GE would provide two AEDs to kick off the challenge, one from GE Corporate and the other from the nearly 200 employees of the Somerset plant. Urging local organizations, businesses and individuals to join in, he said, “Let’s not leave it up to others to take care of our kids and grandchildren.”
Living to Serve: Kevin Crowe’s Life Sparks a Quiet Revolution in Somerset, Kentucky

At 17 years of age, Kevin Crowe had everything going for him: a loving family, many friends, an outstanding record as an athlete with the cross country and track and field teams, a new appointment as regional president of the Future Farmers of America (FFA), and active participation in the agricultural department at Southwestern Pulaski High School. Others describe him as a good, popular and focused person. His plans were to attend college and return to the farm that’s been in his father Gerald’s family for three generations. His mother Libbey said that his life exemplified the FFA national motto:

Learning to do,
Doing to learn,
Earning to live,
Living to serve.

That all changed on April 9, 2004, when after playing a game of ultimate Frisbee in physical education class, Kevin asked his teacher if he could sit down. When the teacher asked Kevin if he was all right, he said he just needed to sit down for a minute, and then slumped over. Those present called 9-1-1 and the school nurse performed CPR until the ambulance arrived. Kevin was transported to the local hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Doctors believe Kevin passed away because of sudden cardiac arrest, a condition in which the electrical functioning of the heart short circuits, causing the heart to stop beating, resulting in cardiovascular collapse—also known as “sudden cardiac death.” Had an automated external defibrillator (AED) been immediately available at the school, it is possible Kevin might be alive today.

A Legacy for Kentucky and a Vision for the Nation

Somerset citizens hope their town can be a model for Kentucky and their state a model for the nation. Tim Eaton, Pulaski superintendent of schools, is chairman of a superintendents’ co-op involving 24 districts in southeast Kentucky. He shared the Somerset story with the membership, hoping that more schools will implement AED programs. In addition, a video featuring Kevin’s mother and others is being made available to each school in the co-op. “Twenty-four school districts is a giant leap into getting the word out,” he said.

“This effort is sweeping the state in waves,” he said, referring to a recent article in the Kentucky PTA newsletter highlighting the effort.

Wilson Sears, superintendent of Somerset Independent Schools, is carving further inroads. Sears, coached in the state for 20 years, and served as president of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association. He issued an “unofficial challenge” to the group that the home school makes sure a defibrillator is present during athletic events. “There are issues,” he said. “We still have to prioritize where the AEDs are going to be—at the football game or the golf tournament or the basketball game? Multiple events can be going on at the same time. If the home team agrees to provide the AED, there is one when you get there.”

The effort has also provided an AED to the local EMS for the monthly Somermites Cruise, a heavily attended auto show that makes getting a defibrillator to a victim by ambulance difficult. The AED will be easy to carry on the golf carts and the EMS team uses for the event.

“The support has been almost overwhelming,” Tammy Price said. “We are a small town. If we can do it, anybody can do it. You just have to have the fortitude to tackle the project.”

Libbey Crowe said, “We’re hoping to make a positive out of a tragedy in our community. We want to help prevent another tragedy. It’s astounding and amazing that all this has happened, and to see what the community has done. You just can’t explain it. Kevin would be so proud, to know that so many people have reached out to carry on a legacy.”

NOTE: AEDs are prescription devices. AED users should be trained in CPR and use of the AED. Please consult your physician. Although not everyone can be saved from sudden cardiac arrest, studies show that survival rates can be dramatically improved with early defibrillation. For more information, please call 1.800.442.1142 or visit www.medtronic-ers.com

Kevin Crowe was a committed member of FFA, and had a new appointment as regional president.

Learning to do,
Doing to learn,
Earning to live,
Living to serve.

Kevin Crowe was a committed member of FFA, and had a new appointment as regional president.

Libbey Crowe said, “We’re hoping to make a positive out of a tragedy in our community. We want to help prevent another tragedy. It’s astounding and amazing that all this has happened, and to see what the community has done. You just can’t explain it. Kevin would be so proud, to know that so many people have reached out to carry on a legacy.”

NOTE: AEDs are prescription devices. AED users should be trained in CPR and use of the AED. Please consult your physician. Although not everyone can be saved from sudden cardiac arrest, studies show that survival rates can be dramatically improved with early defibrillation. For more information, please call 1.800.442.1142 or visit www.medtronic-ers.com

Libbey Crowe said, “We’re hoping to make a positive out of a tragedy in our community. We want to help prevent another tragedy. It’s astounding and amazing that all this has happened, and to see what the community has done. You just can’t explain it. Kevin would be so proud, to know that so many people have reached out to carry on a legacy.”

NOTE: AEDs are prescription devices. AED users should be trained in CPR and use of the AED. Please consult your physician. Although not everyone can be saved from sudden cardiac arrest, studies show that survival rates can be dramatically improved with early defibrillation. For more information, please call 1.800.442.1142 or visit www.medtronic-ers.com

Kevin Crowe was a committed member of FFA, and had a new appointment as regional president.

Learning to do,
Doing to learn,
Earning to live,
Living to serve.

Kevin Crowe was a committed member of FFA, and had a new appointment as regional president.