

Outreach Programs Enhance Community Safety

BY BETH GRAHAM



When the worst happens, the Helotes Dispatch Center is waiting to take your call. If someone dials 911 in the Helotes service area, the caller is connected with emergency dispatch personnel who will not only summon help, but will also stay on the line until that help arrives.

A recent 60 patient regional study for emergency medical services found that 50% of patients receiving resuscitation assistance showed sustained return of spontaneous circulation (ROSC) versus a national average of only 32%. Area residents had a ROSC rate until hospital discharge of 33%, versus the national average of only 8%. Of the individuals in the survey, 29

received bystander cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and the survival rate for individuals who received such assistance was 79%. Lifesaving measures, like CPR, performed during a life-threatening emergency are vital. It saves lives.

Helotes Dispatchers are trained and well prepared to assist callers with implementing emergency procedures before professional help arrives. All nine of Helotes' operators are certified Emergency Medical Dispatchers. If someone has had a heart attack or stopped breathing, the dispatchers are trained to talk a bystander through resuscitation procedures. They act as a calm, resourceful support system for callers who may be unable

Did you know?

You can now also **TEXT 911** in emergencies.

This could save lives for individuals who cannot hear or speak, or who are in a home invasion or domestic abuse situation.

If you are in personal danger, remember to turn off your phone's sound and be sure no light is visible from the screen.



to think clearly or simply not know what to do. Dispatch Supervisor Angela Bocconcelli explains, "Our goal is to empower citizens and give them confidence that they can help. Early intervention is key. Time can make all the difference." "When a heart attack has occurred, you have a staff of certified personnel that will help with lifesaving instructions to assist you. For that reason, it's important that we act quickly." Not content with just answering the phone, the Center is reaching out into the community, as well. After receiving a call from a child who could not give dispatchers essential information, operators realized that people needed to know more about emergency services and how they could operate more effectively for first responders. "Children, especially, may not know addresses, phone numbers, parents' names, and other necessary details," says dispatcher Skylar Dailey. "It's important that they be taught this kind of information so that they can get help if it's needed."

The result was an outreach campaign to inform the community about what emergency dispatchers need to know and how having that information readily available could increase chances of a favorable outcome. They first hosted a booth at the Helotes MarketPlace to distribute information to the general public. Angela Bocconcelli and Skylar walked the grounds and made contact with a number of parents and children. It was then that they realized more needed to be done. After discussing their experience at MarketPlace with Helotes staff, they started several educational outreach programs.

The kickoff event was held at Helotes Elementary School during National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week. Helotes Elementary School Principal, Rhonda Johnson, and her staff accepted a proposal from the Helotes Dispatch team to educate Helotes' youngest citizens about calling 911. Together, they organized a pep rally for students. The dispatchers worked with the Northside Independent School District Police Department, fellow first responders, and a number of employees from Helotes to devise a plan. Together with local merchants, including H-E-B, students received goody bags, police, fire, and EMS personnel made appearances, and Officer Holt brought his police dog Taska, who made everyone smile with her presence. Skits, music, and other activities informed students about 911, including when and how to call.

After success with the children, the Center turned their focus to educating teens and adults about emergency response. Research shows that in a natural disaster or catastrophic accident, lack of preparation can cost lives. This prompted the

Center's second outreach event — free Community Emergency Response Training (CERT). “When there is a major disaster, such as a tornado, fire, or flood, professional first responders may be overwhelmed or delayed when every single second counts,” the Bexar County CERT webpage explains. “In these situations, it is the neighbors or family members that become the first responders. However, without proper training, spur-of-the-moment well-intentioned volunteers often become injured, adding to the problem.”

CERT training allows members of the community to become effective assistants to frontline responders during emergencies. The free 21-hour course includes both classroom and practical training and provides instruction in fire safety, search and rescue, disaster medical aid and triage, and other skills. Anyone can go through the class. “Our class included teachers, retired veterans and everyday citizens. In an actual emergency, there is a role for everyone, and training makes you a more effective volunteer,” says Angela.

A total of 23 trainees completed the May course while under the direction of volunteer instructors from the Bexar County CERT Team. Those who complete the training and join the Bexar County CERT also receive a responder's backpack that includes a hardhat, flashlight, poncho, safety vest, emergency blanket, utility gloves, duct tape, and a tool that can be used as a pry bar to break a window or to turn off water or gas.

Outreach continued with a Public Education Course hosted by Helotes Dispatch. This course provided instruction in basic first aid techniques, and participants learned what to do while waiting for professional help to arrive, including how and when to apply tourniquets and how to perform hands-only resuscitation. “It's essential to have high quality training available for staff and citizens. Preparedness makes a difference,” explained Angela.

The Helotes Dispatch Center is not slowing down. The Center's community outreach efforts continue to grow. The Center is hosting another CERT training course August 18 - 19, 2018. This course will include prerequisite online training and two full days of classroom and hands-on instruction. There is no fee to participate, but registration is mandatory.



Above: Officer Chris Holt, Taska, and City Secretary Celina Perez



To learn more about the Helotes CERT team or other upcoming educational offerings, go to visithelotes.com.

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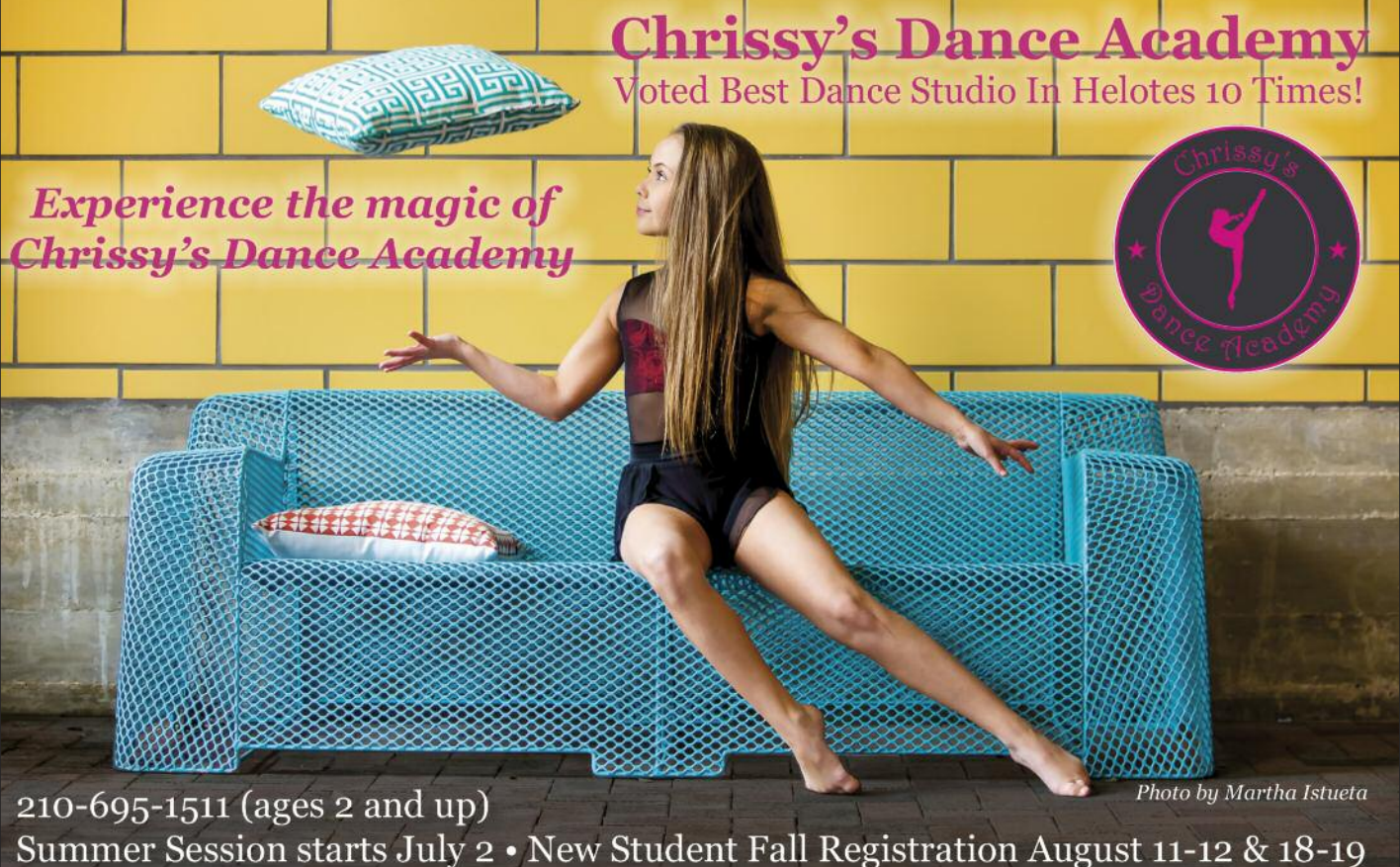
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