



Hector Paredes is Eric's Dad

Turning Tragedy into Triumph

by Greg Geetings, Senior Volunteer (V1301)

"What everybody remembers was his smile," says Lieutenant Commander Hector Paredes (10583), fondly remembering his son Eric who passed away from a Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) in 2009 at the age of 15. Eric Paredes was an outstanding student-athlete at San Diego's Steele Canyon High School. Known for his energy, charm, and outgoing nature, Eric had plans to follow in his father's footsteps as a law enforcement officer.

Eric Paredes had no prior history of a heart abnormality. Tragically, though – when stopping by home for lunch on a summer's day – Paredes found his son collapsed on the kitchen floor. Despite CPR and other emergency measures, Eric could not be revived. "It's something you can't describe, you can't define, and you would never wish on anyone, not even your worst enemy," said Paredes. "It's a pain that never goes away."

Surely, overwhelming grief could be an understandable reason for allowing the world to close in, for allowing enthusiasm and dedication to wane. However, Paredes responded to his son's passing with incredible resolve to

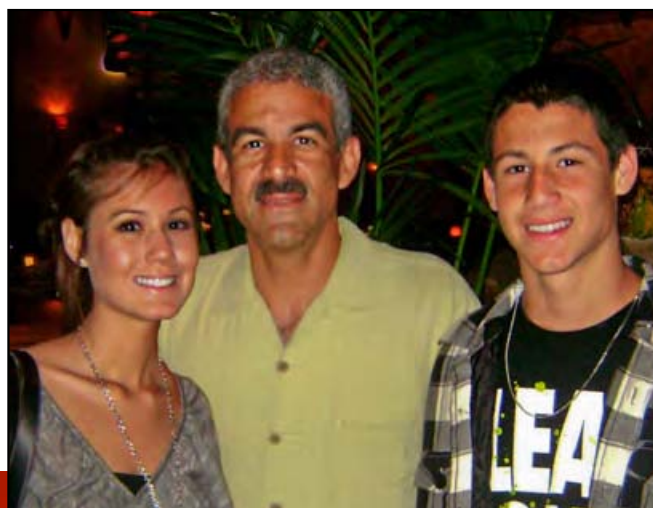
prevent other children and parents from suffering a similar fate. His exceptional volunteer effort led to the establishment of the Eric Paredes Save a Life Foundation. The Foundation promotes and performs preventive cardiac screening of children with electro and echo cardiogram equipment, provides education to parents about the various conditions that can cause SCA, and encourages schools to become equipped with Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) for use in emergency situations.

"I needed to keep busy after Eric's death," commented Paredes. "Establishing the Foundation – and, in that way, helping to keep others safe and healthy – turned out to be an excellent fit with my CHP skills and training, as well as with the CHP's mission. Much of what I had done for the CHP involved administration, public speaking and presentation. Fortunately putting those attributes to work to create and maintain the Foundation, with the help of Eric's mom and others, has proven successful."

The Foundation has now sponsored voluntary

screenings at 13 schools in San Diego County. More than 7,000 students have been screened, and close to 170 students have been identified with heart issues needing treatment or monitoring. Most importantly, nearly 70 of those students have been found to be at serious risk of SCA. The students' parents often have several treatment options to consider, including lifestyle changes, medication, and possible surgical intervention, in a hope to avoid unspeakable misfortune. These figures, incidentally, parallel closely the national statistics on SCA, which claims some 400,000 Americans each year, more than strokes, cancer, and HIV/AIDS combined.

A long-term goal of the Foundation is to collect sufficient



Above: A teen's heart is checked on the echocardiogram at Point Loma High School.

Left: Teens fill out the screening paperwork at Temecula High School. Out of the 417 teens who were screened that day, 12 students needed follow-up visits and 7 were found to be at risk for SCA.

Page 12: Lieutenant Hector Paredes with his children Jessica and Eric.

data to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of including screenings during annual wellness checkups. "Avoiding personal calamity is certainly a key reason for screening every child," concludes Paredes, "but for each child who suffers SCA, there is a considerable cost for emergency services and hospitalization. The truth is that many children can be screened for the cost of one being treated for SCA and early detection saves lives."

John Rogers, a cardiologist at Scripps Clinic and the Foundation's medical director, praises Paredes' efforts. "Simply stated, Hector Paredes is in the ongoing process of turning personal tragedy into a real triumph in the field of public health. His perseverance, passion, and resolve are vital assets to the organization." ■

SAVE A LIFE

The Eric Paredes Save a Life Foundation is a certified non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions are tax deductible, and the purpose of all funding received is to strictly facilitate the Foundation's mission, goals, and vision. One hundred percent of all monies received advance the Foundation's projects. No salaries of any amount are derived from the Foundation.

The Foundation's mission is to prevent Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) – frequently resulting in death – in young people through awareness, education, and action. The Foundation's vision is to expose SCA as a grave health risk affecting young people and to promote health screenings involving electrocardiograms and echocardiograms before children can participate in organized sports and activities.

The Foundation's core beliefs are that:

- Parents, school officials, physicians, and elected officials should be educated on the prevalence of SCA.
- Cardiac screening of children is an important tool to identify heart anomalies that can often lead to SCA.
- Automated External Defibrillators (or AEDs) need to become standard medical equipment at all schools for emergency treatment of SCA.

For more information, please visit the Web site at epsavealife.org.

