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Women share survival stories to help keep hearts beating

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Four out of seven people who suffer from heart disease will live to tell their stories, according to American Heart Association data.

Tuesday was Kathy Webb's first Go Red for Women event, an American Heart Association celebration in Clarksville that encourages women to be aware of the threat of heart disease.

The second annual Go Red event included on-site health screenings, shopping, a heart-healthy lunch and educational presentation led by Dr. Shawn King, a family practitioner.

It also included heart disease survivor stories - and their encouragement to live a heart-healthy lifestyle.

When Webb addressed the crowd of women - and a few men - at the Clarksville Country Club, tears were difficult to hold back.

"God is good," she said. "He's watching out, taking care of me."

She spoke because she wants everyone to be aware of the sometimes subtle symptoms of heart disease.

"Not everyone's signs are going to be the same, especially for women," said the school nurse, prior to her speech. "I just thought that I was getting old."

Webb is a survivor of an almost completely blocked main artery. Though both of her parents had previously had heart attacks and she was suffering from shortness of breath, she never suspected she had heart disease.

Her blood pressure and cholesterol levels had always been within acceptable ranges.

She was undergoing physical therapy on her shoulder when her therapist expressed concern about some dizziness. Both her therapist and Webb first thought the dizziness was being caused by a blockage in an artery in her neck.

When a scan dispelled that worry, Webb decided to have a heart checkup because of her family history.

"I was this close to having a massive heart attack," she said, moving her fingers to about a centimeter apart. "Even the doctor was surprised at what we found."

Webb credits - in part - her physical therapist with inspiring her to have the checkup.

"She probably saved my life," she said. "God was just guiding me along the way."

Webb was one of five survivors to share a story. Another, Larry Robertson, spoke about losing both his parents to heart disease.

"I am a survivor, but not in the way these women are," he said.

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of American women over age 25, and the Go Red

for Women campaign has raised awareness, said event coordinator and nurse Amy McClure.

She hopes the campaign also will inspire women to monitor their heart disease risk factors - and to lead a lifestyle that will ward off the disease.

"There are many things women should lead in, but heart disease is not one of them," she said. "Tides are turning. More people know."

But McClure and the day's survivors encouraged others to take corrective steps, including maintaining proper cholesterol levels, monitoring blood pressure, exercising and quitting smoking.

"This is one of those diseases where we should know our numbers," she said.

"Most people don't have symptoms, that's why it's called the silent killer.

Unfortunately, many of the people who know they have it don't make the lifestyle changes they should. We're all human, and we all have difficulty making changes.

"Go Red in your own way. Please reflect on your lifestyle. The things we do today change tomorrow."

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Photo caption:

Heart disease survivors Mabel Larson, left, Margaret Bird, Dorothy Smith and Kathy Webb sit in front of the lectern as Larry Robertson speaks about his parents at the Go Red for Women luncheon at the Clarksville Country Club Tuesday afternoon.

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