



# CENTRAL ARIZONA FIRE AND MEDICAL EMPLOYEE REUNITES WITH COLLEAGUES WHO SAVED HER LIFE

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Coordinator | CAFMA



*Photo: L-R: CAFMA Engineer/Paramedic Russ Smith, Firefighter/EMT Cammi Hoobler, Administrative Specialist Denise Krizo, and Captain/Paramedic Travis Smith. (Not pictured: Firefighter John Craik).*

On December 3, 2023, Denise Krizo, an Administrative Specialist for the Central Arizona Fire and Medical Authority (CAFMA), experienced a life-altering moment while volunteering for the Firefighter Angel Foundation at the CAFMA Warehouse in Prescott Valley, Arizona. Suddenly, Denise went into cardiac arrest. Thanks to the quick actions of her off-duty colleagues, also volunteering that day, Denise's life was saved through early, effective CPR and the timely use of an Automated External Defibrillator (AED).

Upon learning of Denise's distress, Firefighter Cammi Hoobler, then in training at CAFMA's Fire Academy, lowered Denise to the ground safely and began engaging with a 9-1-1 dispatcher. CAFMA Engineer/Paramedic Russell 'Russ' Smith wasted no time in initiating chest compressions while Captain/Paramedic Travis Smith swiftly brought the heart monitor. Firefighter John Craik, also a recruit at the time, assisted. Remarkably, within a minute of being shocked, Denise opened her eyes and was coherent, a rare occurrence post-cardioversion.

Engineer Smith expressed, "I have run my fair share of cardiac arrests, far more than I can count, and that is the quickest I have seen somebody recover. I firmly believe that Denise's successful outcome was due to timing; it was due to early, effective CPR and being able to shock her heart within a minute or two of recognizing the cardiac arrest."

Denise herself emphasized the importance of CPR training and AED accessibility, stating, "I was before, and remain, a big proponent of CPR training, especially where AEDs are concerned. An AED is a no-brainer, it coaches you through what to do and even gives you a rhythm for CPR. Anyone can use an AED to save a life."

Following open heart surgery to address a valve issue, Denise continues to make an astonishing recovery. She has returned to her role at CAFMA supporting the very first responders who saved her life, noting humorously, "I'm happy to not be dead! I'm forever thankful for the good people I had around me that day; my family will not forget how CAFMA rallied around us."

She continues, "I truly hope that people consider becoming CPR certified. I'm here today because CPR was started within seconds, and I

was shocked very quickly. Those are the facts. Get trained and, as Russ says, don't be afraid to act."

Scott Freitag, CAFMA Fire Chief, highlighted the crucial role of community CPR and AED awareness: "We cannot overstate the importance of community CPR, which includes knowing how to operate an AED and being conscious of where they are if someone goes into cardiac arrest out in the community. Those precious seconds are what counted for Denise."

As February marks American Heart Month, this poignant story serves as a reminder to the community to become familiar with the signs and symptoms of heart attack, to seek immediate medical attention if experiencing such symptoms, and to become CPR certified and able to confidently utilize AEDs when necessary.

CAFMA proudly offers community CPR, AED, and first aid training and features its AED program, tailored specifically for non-profit organizations. For further information, visit <https://www.cazfire.gov> or call the Administration Office at 928-772-7711.

To watch Denise and Engineer/Paramedic Smith's reunion and listen to them recount this incredible story, tune in to the *'The Day I Died'* episode of the CAFMA Connect podcast, available on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/@CentralAZFire>, and popular podcast platforms.

## **ABOUT CAFMA**

The Central Arizona Fire and Medical Authority (CAFMA) provides emergency services and all hazards response for 369 square miles of Yavapai County, Arizona, including the towns of Prescott Valley, Chino Valley, Dewey-Humboldt, areas of Paulden, and outlying areas of Prescott.