

## Employee credited with lifesaving action at gym

By ELIZABETH LOWE, *Standard-Times* correspondent

DARTMOUTH -- Manny Braga Jr., a 60-year-old fitness fan, might not be here today if not for Craig Leonardo.

Mr. Braga, who suffered cardiac arrest on Sept. 21 while working out at Healthtrax, the Southcoast Wellness Center's fitness club, was kept alive by the quick reaction of Mr. Leonardo, a wellness coordinator and personal trainer at Healthtrax.

"I don't remember anything that happened," said Mr. Braga, who was recently released from the New England Medical Center in Boston. "I was on the treadmill warming up, and from what I understand I just dropped, there were no warning signs or anything."

Mr. Braga had a liver transplant 3½ years ago at New England Medical. "Ever since then he's been coming to the gym every other day," said his wife, Jeannette. "We thought all his problems were gone."

Hearing yelling and a request to call 911, Mr. Leonardo grabbed the Wellness Center's medical bag and automated external defibrillator, or AED, and ran to the scene.

"I was coming out of the office and I heard yelling, so my first reaction was to get the medical bag and do whatever I could to help."

When Mr. Leonardo arrived at the scene, two women had already begun performing CPR on Mr. Braga, who was lying across the treadmill.

"I attached the AED and made sure everything was clear while the machine analyzed his condition," Mr. Leonardo said. Before the paramedics arrived, he administered two shocks to Mr. Braga's heart.

Mr. Braga was rushed to St. Luke's hospital, where he was kept on a respirator for a day, while the hospital ran tests on his heart, his wife said. He was then sent to New England Medical for two weeks, where he underwent double bypass surgery and had a defibrillator implanted into his chest.

"There was a 5 percent chance that the bypass wouldn't work, so they had to insert the defibrillator," Mrs. Braga said. "But the doctors said that if it weren't for Craig and his use of the AED, my husband wouldn't have made it."

"The AED resumes activity in the heart with a shock of electricity," Mr. Leonardo said.

Mr. Leonardo had been trained to use the AED as part of a mandatory course given at the Wellness Center to all employees.

Sudden cardiac arrest strikes about 250,000 American adults every year, and about 95 percent die before reaching the hospital, according to the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Mr. Braga and his wife are grateful for Mr. Leonardo's action, and the foresight of the Southcoast Health System, which initiated the availability of the AED at the Wellness Center two years ago, according to Debra Gidley, the executive director of the center.

"I just felt really proud of Craig," Mrs. Gidley said. "And he rose to the challenge and handled it perfectly."

"I plan on going back to the gym after I recover" Mr. Braga said.

"But I'm not sure if I'll let him go on the treadmill," his wife said.



**BILL BELKNAP/Standard-Times special**  
Manny Braga Jr., center, and his wife, Jeannette, stand with Healthtrax wellness coordinator and personal trainer Craig Leonardo. The three are displaying the defibrillation equipment used on Mr. Braga after he suffered cardiac arrest at the Dartmouth gym in September.