

At the



of it All



Every worthy cause requires a champion who is willing to go all in. Terry Gordon, D.O. (COM '80), just won't stop until automated external defibrillators are ready to save lives at every school in America.

*By Michael Johnson
Photography by Geoff Butler*

Now retired, Terry Gordon, D.O. (COM '80), built an impressive resumé during his decades as a cardiologist.

He completed an invasive cardiology fellowship at the renowned Cleveland Clinic before practicing more than 21 years at Akron General Medical Center, where he was part of the first physician team in that community to implant an internal cardiac defibrillator.

Yet, Dr. Gordon somehow managed to stay grounded. Even the shortest of conversations with Dr. Gordon will reveal someone with a deep caring for human life, a conviction to serve others despite personal obstacles, and an unwavering belief in the difference one person can make.

It's more than the words he chooses. Through the sincerity in his voice, you can immediately feel the compassion he has for life itself and the immense responsibility he knows physicians shoulder. His activities document a devotion to a mission he believes was thrust upon him. It came as he watched a video clip showing the agonizing

minutes following the collapse and death of Josh Miller, a 15-year-old Ohio boy, who collapsed during a high school football game in 2000.

Because of his cardiology experience, Dr. Gordon suspected Josh had suffered sudden cardiac arrest (SCA). His heart had stopped working, and if normal rhythm can't be re-established within minutes, blood flow to the body's organs stops. Death is the likely outcome. For every minute lost, the chances of survival drop 10 percent. Nationally, the average EMT response time is eight to 10 minutes.

Despite the CPR attempts of bystanders, and later by arriving EMTs, Josh died on that football field. Was it an isolated death? Statistics say no. According to the American Heart Association, more than 5,000 cases of sudden cardiac arrests occur yearly among those under age 21, and to more than 225,000 adults per year.

"You don't have a lot of time, especially when there is ventricular fibrillation," said Larry Handlin, D.O. (COM '86), a cardiologist and partner at Mexico Cardiology Associates in Mexico, Mo. "SCA symptoms typically wouldn't be picked up in ordinary high school physicals. So, when it happens to young people, it's especially tragic."

Plus, when a SCA occurs, experts know CPR often is not enough. Today, the American Heart Association and the American Red Cross include the use of Automated External Defibrillators, along with CPR, in all first-aid courses.

In the days after Josh Miller's death, Dr. Gordon said he felt a calling to help prevent more deaths. The haunting video of that night's events spawned a rapid-fire set of questions in his mind. Why wasn't an AED – crucial to restarting or normalizing the heart rhythm in such cases – available on the football field or on board the ambulance? Why wasn't the importance of AEDs more widely known? Why weren't AEDs available at schools, often gathering places for events attended by people of all ages?

It isn't often that something is placed before us that defines our purpose in crystal-clear fashion," Dr. Gordon said, replaying the video in his mind. "It was sickening, knowing that a simple device, an automated external defibrillator, was not available to those who so desperately tried to resuscitate Josh."

Dr. Gordon knew he was in a unique position to answer these daunting questions. If CPR alone is used, survival can nearly double, to 5 to 10 percent of cases; if CPR



Miller

is coupled with use of an AED, the survival rate can be 50 percent or higher.

Unwilling to let the issue go unanswered, Dr. Gordon began lining up influential people within the county's leadership circles, along with Akron General staff and health experts within the AHA and other agencies. His goal was getting new legislation enacted that would place AEDs in middle and high schools in Summit County, Ohio, and train 12 individuals per location in how to use the devices. Not some schools. All of them.

Thanks to the leadership and perseverance of Dr. Gordon and others, Summit County in 2002 became the first county of its size in the nation to have an integrated AED placement program in all middle and high schools. And, instead of being satisfied by this level of success, Dr. Gordon saw it as a stepping stone to saving more lives in schools throughout Ohio.

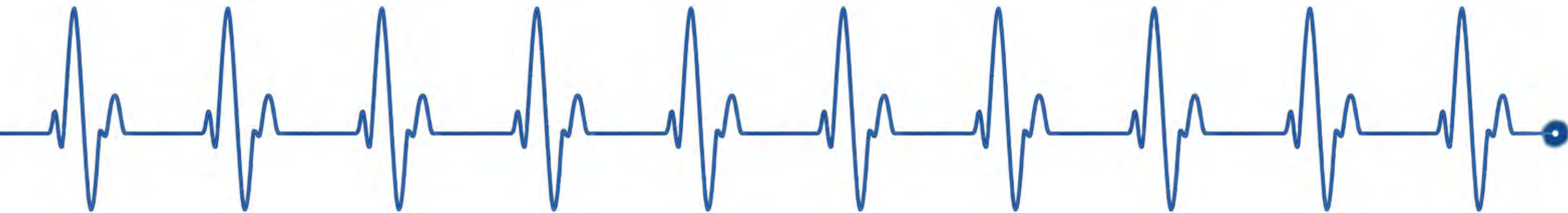
Every day, about 20 percent of the adult and child population in America is at our schools," Dr. Gordon said. Smoke detectors, which have long been mandated in schools, shopping malls, government buildings and even on airliners, save an estimated 6,000 lives per year. AEDs could save 50,000 lives per year, according to the AHA.

In 2002, the Ohio AED Initiative, based largely upon the successful template that had been used in Summit County, was approved by both the Ohio House and the Senate. The legislation resulted in two funding allotments of \$2.5 million each to Ohio schools. More than 4,470 AEDs were placed in public and private schools, along with CPR/AED training for 15,000 people at those locations. In addition, each local school collaborated with their local emergency agencies to ensure that AEDs could be located and used when needed.

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Terry Gordon, D.O. (COM '80)



To date, there have been at least 15 ‘saves’ as a result of this initiative,” said Sue Hobson, director of community health and community relations at Akron General Medical Center. In 2002, Hobson served as the statewide initiative’s project manager, so she came to know that Dr. Gordon’s impact on the issue was critically important.

It’s really been Terry’s perseverance and diligence that made this happen,” she said. “Before, I had known him as one of the hospital’s excellent cardiologists, but he’s also a gem of a man. Very, very giving and supportive.”

For his efforts, Dr. Gordon was named as the 2002 National Physician of the Year by the American Heart Association.

The same day the Ohio initiative was completed, U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton (Ohio) asked Dr. Gordon about taking the integrated program to the national stage. In 2008, Rep. Sutton introduced The Josh Miller HEARTS Act (HR 4926) in the U.S. House of Representatives. The House passed it later that year, sending it to the U.S. Senate. The bill, however, failed to make it out of committee, despite endorsements from the AHA, the American Red Cross, the National Education Association, the American Academy of Pediatricians and the National Safety Council, among others.

“I wasn’t going to take no for an answer,” Dr. Gordon said. “That’s my modus operandi.”

New versions of the House bill were introduced in 2009 and 2011. A Senate version of the legislation was introduced in February 2012. The legislation has yet to make it out of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

Meanwhile, statistics show that since the bill was first introduced, “206 children have needlessly died of cardiac arrest in our nation’s schools,” according to an article pub-

lished by Parent Heart Watch, a national AED advocacy organization.

Dr. Gordon’s large-scale efforts to increase the use and distribution of automated external defibrillators are a product of his belief that he is here to help others. After all, his destiny to become a physician was revealed clearly to him at just 7 years old. Growing up in Louisville, Ky., Dr. Gordon recalls seeing a late 1950s TV program called “Operation Open Heart,” which showed actual footage of open-heart surgeries.

“I remember a patient named Gussie, unable to do anything (before surgery),” Dr. Gordon said. “Then, they showed Gussie afterward. (That’s when) I decided to be a doctor.”

The path to Dr. Gordon’s ultimate goal of becoming a physician was not easy, though. He found himself on a jagged journey, driven by a dream that he would not – could not – let go. He tells the story of his father becoming ill during his freshman year at Emory University. The emotional turmoil resulted in him receiving a “D” in chemistry. That’s a disturbing start for anyone hoping to enter medical school.

Dr. Gordon settled for a bachelor’s degree in psychology at Emory. Still holding on to the idea of a medical career, he decided to look at Tulane University, intending to get a master’s degree in hospital administration. Yet, in another defining moment, Dr. Gordon recalls walking with a professor in Tulane’s hospital administration program during his visit to campus. As they walked between hospital buildings they were about to tour, the professor looked up and wistfully noted that “sometimes I forget there are patients in there.”

Not see patients? Not have the ability to help and heal on a personal level? Unacceptable, thought Dr. Gordon. He knew he needed to be in medical school.

As destiny might have it, Dr. Gordon’s brother-in-law, Barry Siegel, D.O. (COM ’71), was a KCUMB graduate and practicing family medicine in Coral Gables, Fla. Ensuing conversations about the University and its approach to osteopathic medical education led Dr. Gordon to apply and be accepted at the University in 1976.

“It’s been a perfect fit,” Dr. Gordon said. “The holistic approach to medicine had always attracted me. I knew that somehow everything is connected. Each system is in a symbiotic relationship with the others. Every cell in the body is there for the good of the whole.”



Dr. Gordon gives a brief explanation of how the automated external defibrillator works to a school official while standing on the sideline at a football practice. He has been instrumental in getting AEDs in all Ohio middle and high schools.

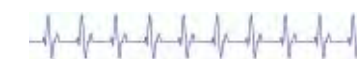
He remembers his years at KCUMB quite fondly and vividly, noting that the more education he went through, the more empowered he felt.

“The education I received there was superb,” Dr. Gordon said.

After receiving his medical degree, Dr. Gordon did an emergency medicine rotation at Akron General, then was accepted into the internal medicine program there from 1981-84. He also completed a fellowship in invasive cardiology at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in 1987.

In his 20-plus years of service at Akron General, Dr. Gordon achieved board certifications in internal medicine and in cardiovascular disease. Dr. Gordon is also well known for other community endeavors, including serving as a founding member of Stewart’s Caring Place, a facility for those with cancer, as well activities with The Youth Mo-

tivational Task Force, which encourages Akron’s inner-city youth. He serves as co-host of “Docs Who Rock,” an annual Akron United Way fund-raising event.



In one sense, Ken Miller is just another admirer of Dr. Gordon’s community efforts. Yet, the connection the sales representative feels to Dr. Gordon goes much deeper. It started years ago, that night on a high school football field in Summit County. Ken and Jerri Miller are the parents of Josh Miller, the boy whose tragic death started Dr. Gordon’s efforts to get AEDs in schools.

In the years since Josh’s death, the relationship between Dr. Gordon and the Millers has grown increasingly close.

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Dr. Gordon



Ken and Jerri Miller have worked alongside Dr. Gordon to trumpet the need for AEDs in public places, including traveling with Dr. Gordon to testify before Congress in Washington, D.C.

“I would do whatever Dr. Gordon called on me to do,” Ken Miller said.

Ten years after the passing of the Ohio legislation, Dr. Gordon remains as dedicated as ever to the issue of national deployment of AEDs in schools. He also has seen

his own medical career wind down, partially due to lingering effects from a head and neck injury caused by a fall at his home. Because he believed that his skills were not as sharp as they should be, he retired from treating patients in 2008.

In addition to being an advocate for AED availability and use, he completed the book *“No Storm Lasts Forever: Transforming Suffering Into Insight”* earlier this year. It’s

both a memoir of spiritual growth stemming from his son, Tyler, becoming a quadriplegic as a result of a 2009 car accident and a guide to assist others in finding peace and purpose in their lives after tragic life events.

Dr. Gordon was recently named the 2012 recipient of the Bert A. Polsky Humanitarian Award, the highest award given for community service by the Akron Community Foundation. Still, the best endorsement of Dr. Gordon’s commitment to helping others may come from someone who knows his heart best: Ken Miller.

“There are a lot of people who do things for a pat on the back, but that’s the farthest thing from his mind,” Miller said. “It took a tragedy for us to meet, but he touched my life. Terry is that rare human being.”

FEEDBACK: Send comments on this article to editor@kcumb.edu.



Passing the Torch

Retired Cardiologist Offers Advice for Successful Living

Toward the end of one’s career, everyone has accumulated wisdom. Dr. Gordon’s lifelong desire to serve others has led him to offer these insights to help navigate life’s journey:

- “What happens to us doesn’t matter; what I choose to do with my experience does matter.”
- “Trust your intuitive self. My intuition was to be a doctor. Don’t die with your music still inside you.”
- “If you’re going to be a doctor, treat each of your patients as a loved one. Like it or not, you will be loved as you love.”
- “Life is not a random set of experiences; it is a learning curve.”
- “Cloudy days are important in the overall scheme of things. It is very difficult to fully appreciate the beauty of sunlight until you know what it’s like to be without it.”
- “Hope is what sustains us through the storm, this period of seemingly insurmountable adversity. Hope is the promise that a positive outcome is within our reach.”

For more information on Dr. Gordon, visit www.drterrygordon.com, or pick up a copy of his book, *“No Storm Lasts Forever: Transforming Suffering Into Insight.”*

RISING UP

Medical Student Overcomes Struggles During High School to Find Success at KCUMB

By Joshua Roberts
Photography by Bob Greenspan

As a teenager, Kameelah Rahman was a person with vast potential. As a student, though, she admits she was missing a key ingredient to a successful academic life – desire.

Apathy, as it so often does, trumps potential.

Rahmaan was slated to graduate with her Pomona (Calif.) High School Red Devils’ Class of 1998, but there was a catch, and it was substantial: She had lost interest in school, stopped going to classes and dropped out entirely months earlier.

All this was unknown to her parents, a high school teacher and a nurse, who had come to realize the value of a commitment to education.

“I think I had just lost all interest,” she said. “I was a kid who just fell through the cracks, who had a lot of potential but not a lot of motivation.

“I just stopped going. I failed a class and it became too much to try. It all sounds so arrogant now.”

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