

January 23, 2013**For Immediate Release****Contact:** JoAnn Cavanaugh, Director Public Relations**Office:** (716) 706-2061 | **Cell:** (716) 228-4886 | **Email:** kjc4281@CHSBuffalo.org

Athletic Trainer Gives Referee Life Beyond the Court

At first glance, it might seem like Melissa Hudecki, ATC, a certified athletic trainer with Catholic Health AthletiCare, was in the right place at the right time, but with years of training and experience in all types of sports related injuries and emergencies, she was simply doing her job when she helped save the life of James Martek, a local high school sports referee.

Martek was refereeing a varsity basketball game at Mount Mercy Academy on January 4, when he collapsed from an apparent heart attack. Recognizing what had happened, Melissa, who was working the game, immediately ran to center court and began administering CPR. She then applied the school's automated external defibrillator before Buffalo firefighters arrived to continue the resuscitation efforts.

Martek was taken by ambulance to Mercy Hospital where he was put into a medically induced coma with hypothermia therapy under the direction of neurologist Dr. Catalina Ionita. By lowering his body temperature, Dr. Ionita was able to stabilize his critical condition. When he woke up two days later, he had no recollection of what had happened.

Both Kelly Finkowski, manager of AthletiCare, and Dr. Rob Wall, a cardiologist with the Catholic Health Heart Center, agreed that Melissa's quick actions contributed to Martek's remarkable recovery. Because his heart attack was caused by an arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat), Dr. Wall implanted a small device in Martek's chest, similar to a pacemaker, to monitor his heart and prevent any future arrhythmias.

Before leaving the hospital on January 10, Martek made time to meet with Melissa to thank her for all she had done. The two have known each other for a number of years through local sports circles. It was an emotional meeting with hospital staffers and local media on hand to capture the special moment. "If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be here," said Martek as the two embraced. He then called her his "angel of mercy" for her efforts on the basketball court less than a week earlier.

Melissa, who has been an athletic trainer for 14 years, was humbled by the attention. "I was just doing my job," she said – a job she has been trained for and would do again for any athlete, referee or spectator who has a medical emergency.

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