

Pastor Steve Hetzel of Onawa, IA is a 35 gallon blood donor. Each time he is eligible to donate, Steve and a fellow 35 gallon blood donor come to the Sioux City 1019 Jones Street donation site and give blood. There may not be a single Siouxland Community Blood Bank staff member who doesn't know Steve Hetzel; his good-natured ribbing of staff and other blood donors make him impossible to miss. Fortunately for Steve, the Siouxland Community Blood Bank staff didn't miss his irregular heartbeat in 2008.

During the routine mini-physical prior to his May platelet donation, the staff member gathering his vital statistics noticed the problem. Far above the average resting heart rate of 60-90 beats per minute, Steve's heart rate was clocked at 120 beats per minute. After waiting a while to see if it would go down, the employee checked his pulse again; it hadn't gone down. Because blood donors need to be completely healthy to donate for the safety of the recipients and for their own safety, Steve was told that he wasn't able to donate at that time. The staff member also suggested he go see his doctor which he did that afternoon where he was put on medication to slow down his pulse.

At Steve's next donation appointment he was relieved to see the medication was working when his heart rate was timed at 69 beats per minute. This time, however, he was told not to donate because they counted 11 skipped beats per minute. Once again, the Siouxland Community Blood Bank staff suggested he see his doctor.

His doctor recommended he wear a portable heart rate monitor for one to two days to be able to monitor his heart rate for an extended period of time. While at the ER to receive his monitor, the hospital staff showed his heart rate to be 170 beats per minute. Steve was surprised at this because he hadn't experienced any symptoms of a heart condition such as chest pain, dizziness, shortness of breath or nausea.

Steve was given a few injections to lower his heart rate, but unfortunately it lowered it to 49 beats per minute—dangerously low. He was then sent to Creighton Cardiac hospital in Omaha where he was diagnosed with supraventricular tachycardia which occurs when the work of the upper chambers of the heart don't coincide with the work being done by the lower chambers.

Steve is now on a daily medication that will control his rapid heart rate. The medication is on the approved list of medications that it is okay to donate while on. He is very happy to be able to get back in to give blood and save more lives.

"Gist of it all is---the "needle sisters" (as he refers to the collection staff) found the problem and offered sound advice about being checked over by my local doctor. Especially important since there were no other signs or symptoms. The simple routine check-in procedure found the problem which was easily controlled. Great job by your front line workers," he said.