

*making a difference*

# LOCAL RESIDENT HELPING TO SAVE LIVES

“You don’t get rid of grief. You learn to deal with grief,” says Bob Alico, a retired teacher and 15 year McDowell Mountain Ranch resident. He lost his wife to a heart attack five years ago. But Judy Alico didn’t pass away from an ordinary heart attack. The 51-year-old was in perfect health and showed no symptoms until the day of her heart attack. It was a Sunday morning in January 2011. Bob was getting ready to meet some friends to watch a football game and Judy, a graphic designer, was working on a project for her business.

That morning, Judy had not been feeling well, and soon she began to have pain in her right arm. When she started to have trouble breathing, Bob called an ambulance. After three calls the ambulance arrived at their home. By that time, Judy was still

conscious but experiencing blurry vision. The emergency room doctors treated her symptoms as a regular heart attack.

Judy’s family stayed with her in the hospital for two days where she ended up being placed on life support before passing away. The doctors told Bob that they would probably never know what caused her heart attack. She had no known risk factors for heart disease. And that was it! Judy’s doctors weren’t going to investigate any further. The autopsy provided no answers as to why she had a heart attack. Bob was distraught. He wanted answers. He needed answers. Bob remembers asking himself, “What caused us to lose the most important person in our lives?”

As luck would have it, the family soon got the answers they so desperately needed for closure.





Writer Kira Householder meets Dr. Hayes.



Bob Alico and Dr. Hayes in front of Mayo Clinic Phoenix



Bob's sister-in-law had an upcoming appointment with her doctor, so she suggested that Bob fax Judy's medical records to him. This doctor was the first one to give Bob an answer. He suggested that Judy's heart attack may have been caused by spontaneous coronary artery dissection, or SCAD. Bob didn't know it at the time, but these four letters would change his life forever.

Bob researched online and found that Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota was about to launch the world's first study on SCAD heart attacks. When he called the hospital the next morning, he learned that the doctor leading the study was Dr. Sharonne Hayes. Bob sent Judy's medical records to Dr. Hayes, a women's heart health expert, and she confirmed that Judy had a SCAD heart attack.

Spontaneous coronary artery dissection is a rare and poorly understood condition. It is different from a regular heart attack, but presents with very similar, sometimes identical, symptoms. Many doctors misdiagnose patients with a regular heart attack because they have never even heard of a SCAD heart attack. SCAD occurs when an inner layer of a coronary artery suddenly tears, blocking blood flow to the heart. This can cause chest pain, acute coronary syndrome, heart attack or sudden cardiac death. The average

age the condition impacts is 42-years-old, and 70 percent of patients are younger than 50. More than ten percent of survivors experience one or more recurrences. SCAD is much more common among women than men, often affecting people with no underlying conditions or risk factors. However, pregnancy is a risk factor for SCAD. Unfortunately, SCAD also affects many athletes. Some call it the "healthy person's heart attack."

Soon, Bob had turned his wife's tragic, sudden passing into his next purpose in life. He felt that it was his duty to promote research and awareness of SCAD. To do this, Bob started SCAD Research, Inc. in June of 2011. When Bob proposed his idea to Dr. Hayes, she told him that he was the first person in the world to ask to raise money for SCAD research. To this Bob said, "I didn't plan to take on the world."

Bob met with lawyers and financial advisors until he had officially founded a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

The original group of board members consisted of Bob and his family, with Bob as the original president, but since then it has grown to include many SCAD survivors and scientists. The nonprofit raises funds for the most promising SCAD research, which Dr. Hayes is conducting at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN.

Dr. Hayes is a cardiologist and the director of Mayo Clinic's Women's Heart Clinic. She actively promotes women's cardiovascular health issues, both locally and nationally. She is the co-founder and medical director of the Science and Leadership Symposium for Women with Heart Disease, which trains women to bring heart health education to their communities. She is a member of the Board of Directors for Women Heart, and a scientific advisor to SCAD Research, Inc.

SCAD is one of Dr. Hayes' primary focuses, and she is currently conducting research on survivors and their families. Her work is groundbreaking, as very

little is known about SCAD. The research project at Mayo Clinic began when a group of SCAD survivors approached Dr. Hayes asking for answers. Looking back on Bob's support of early SCAD research, Dr. Hayes and her team refer to him as "the wind behind our sails." When Bob first heard about Dr. Hayes' project, raising funds was critical, and Bob volunteered to do just that. Dr. Hayes was very generous with her time, Bob recalls, and she patiently answered all of his questions about Judy's condition.

Since Bob founded the organization in 2011, SCAD research, awareness, and funding has come a long way. It started with just a few survivors, and has grown to an international community of more than 1,200 survivors. Now, the nonprofit hosts an annual 5k Walk-Run in Illinois, along with several other fundraisers throughout the year. They receive many donations from survivors, families who have lost someone to SCAD, and people who simply want to help foster awareness and progress.

Along with funding Mayo's research project, the organization offers a community for survivors and family members to discuss their experiences. This support lets survivors know that, even though their condition is rare, they are not alone. SCAD Research, Inc. encourages survivors to tell their stories and make SCAD known.

SCAD Research, Inc.'s next goal is to raise around \$1 million so the research team can map survivors' genomes to study the potential hereditary aspect of the condition. Visit [www.scadresearch.org](http://www.scadresearch.org) to learn more.

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