

New lease on life

By BRIAN WALKER/Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, August 1, 2016 12:00 am

POST FALLS — John Swalve was on cruise control physically — until June 2.

That's when the maintenance man at the Walmart near the state line collapsed due to a heart attack as he was cleaning a bathroom.

"I've never had any problems until then," the Post Falls man said. "Sometimes you don't have warning. I don't remember anything — just waking up in the hospital and people asking me if I knew what had happened."

Swalve said he can't thank responders enough for saving his life. "No matter how many times you thank them, it's still not enough," the 60-year-old said.

A series of helpers gave Swalve a new lease on life.

Walmart employee Donald Withrow discovered Swalve unconscious and "purple in color" in the bathroom and immediately notified a supervisor, according to a police report.

Two employees, Sarah Koenig and Nicholas Lundt, started the CPR process before Post Falls Police Officer Todd Flood took over.

Kootenai County Fire and Rescue responders, including John Ward, Scott Oliver, Pete Holley, Andrew Kaplan, Mitchell Copstead, Ron Graham Sam LaPresta, Kelly Krause and Bryon Johnson, then arrived to assist until Swalve had a pulse.

"We used the defibrillator several times on the patient and successfully converted him back into a perfusing heart rhythm," said Steven Isaacson, KCFR's EMS division chief.

Swalve was transported to Kootenai Health and returned to work about a week ago.

"I can't do near as much around the house and in the yard as much as I used to, but I'm getting better every day," he said. "Looking back on it, it's scary because I didn't have any warning and just went down. Thanks to everybody involved, I am here. If they hadn't done what they did, my heart doctor said I wouldn't be here."

The emergency responders were presented with Life Saving Awards during their agencies' meetings last week. Swalve attended both meetings to thank them and stand up with them during the presentations.

"Clearly, without the immediate and skilled response of Officer Flood (and others), this male would likely have died," police Chief Scot Haug said during the city council meeting. The experience has prompted Swalve to plan to take a CPR class through work. "Some employees know it, but I don't," he said. "It's a good thing to know. You can save somebody's life."