



# Fire Department

## A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

By S. S. La-Sky



If you play you've got to pay. This advice should be given out to arriving tourists along with their baggage claim checks and casino funbooks. "Las Vegas syndrome" is how we locals jokingly refer to the shared symptoms many visitors experience.

Lightheaded, dizzy, faint, shortness of breath and irregular heart rhythms have logged many miles on rescue units located near "The Strip". When one of those heartbeats cease however, so does the joking.

Cardiac arrest is an unlaughable, though all too common occurrence in Las Vegas, which has a rate two to three times higher than cities with similar populations. The majority of these arrests occur in the hotel/casino setting, largely due to altered behavior patterns (non-compliance with prescribed medications, alcohol consumption, insufficient food or sleep, heat and gambling stresses). Moderation is the key here folks, but we all know how easy it is to misplace our keys.

Fortunately, for 63-year-old Thurman Austin of China Grove, North Carolina, the Clark County Fire Department identified this unfortunate trend. Realizing that in the instance of cardiac arrest every minute counts, the CCFD, led by Paramedic Richard Hardman, developed an *Automatic External Defibrillator* (AED) program. This puts the potentially life saving heart monitors in the hands of first responders, which in the case of our many hotels is usually the Security Officers. The first occurrence of a life save nationwide in the hospitality industry occurred at the Stardust Hotel and Casino on the afternoon of July 1.

When Austin collapsed on the casino floor, Investigator William Cage and Security Officers Darryl Ryales and Kyu Choe were by his side within minutes. They attached the AED to Austin and found no pulse. At this time Austin was clinically dead. C.P.R. was initiated and the officers delivered two shocks. Upon arrival Clark County Fire Department Paramedic Roger Brooks and Engineer Jim Johnson assumed patient care. Moments later, en route to an area hospital, Austin had not only returned from the brink, but was alert and responsive. He returned home to North Carolina days later with no lasting deficits.



Fire department paramedics and attending physicians agreed that if it hadn't been for the innovative Clark County Fire Department AED program, which provided the training and helped to place the needed equipment in the right hands, the outcome could have been very different. Austin's wife, Gwen, summed it up best. "If we hadn't come to Las Vegas and been at the Stardust Hotel, my husband would be dead," she said.