

BizALERT

2020 GOOTTER GRAND SLAM GALA

Presenting the Steven M. Gootter
Foundation Philanthropic Award

Friday, Feb. 7, 6:30 p.m.

The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa
3800 E. Sunrise Road

\$200 per person

Sponsorships available

Please visit:

www.stevenmgootterfoundation.org
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Honoree Kwan C. An

WOMEN
WHO LEAD

PHOTOS: CARTER ALLEN



Dr. Jil Tardiff, Steven M. Gootter Endowed Chair for the
Prevention and Treatment of Sudden Cardiac Death

Chasing a Cure

Gootter Foundation Fuels Cardiac Research

By Tara Kirkpatrick

It's the drive of the Messing family that motivates Dr. Jil Tardiff every day.

Tardiff, holder of the Steven M. Gootter Endowed Chair for the Prevention of Sudden Cardiac Death, said it's the tireless work of Andrew and Claudine Messing to combat this silent killer that daily inspires her medical research at the University of Arizona.

"This is a family that took a horrific tragedy and turned it into a legacy on so many different levels," said Tardiff, a UA professor of cellular and molecular medicine. "Holding this chair is a daily reminder for me. There's a greater good that motivates me."

Steven Gootter, Claudine's brother and a father of two, suffered sudden cardiac death (SCD) while on a morning run in 2005. It's the same culprit behind half of all U.S. heart disease deaths, killing almost 300,000 people a year.

Claudine and husband, Andrew, along with family and friends, created the volunteer-run Gootter Foundation after his death to defeat SCD through research, awareness, education and distribution of AEDs – which deliver a life-saving shock to SCD victims.

SCD begins as sudden cardiac arrest. The heart abruptly stops beating, halting blood flow to vital organs, especially the brain. The victim loses consciousness and will die unless emergency treatment is begun within minutes. The major risk factor for SCD is coronary artery disease, but often there are no signs or symptoms – and thus no warning.

Tardiff is one of the most public faces of the cardiac research funded by the Gootter Foundation. Her work focuses on the underlying mechanics of hyper-

trophic cardiomyopathy, a disorder that inhibits the heart from pumping blood efficiently. It's one of the more common causes of SCD. Her lab is identifying early molecular "signatures" of the disease in young patients with gene mutations.

"Any sort of heart disease is much harder to address once the process has started," she said. "What has become an enormous focus for myself and others in the field is to look at folks who haven't yet developed disease. That's a golden opportunity to intervene and change the natural history of the disorder."

Tardiff has opened her own referral clinic for patients with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. "I see a range of patients who don't have access to this range of care. That was another thing that I was inspired, in part, by the Gootter example – to go out on a limb to make a difference."

"Jil is one of the most respected experts on SCD in the world," said Claudine. "We are most fortunate to have someone of her caliber in Tucson."

Along with the endowed chair, the Gootter Foundation finances investigator awards to scientists working on the most promising studies related to SCD. Recent work has focused on enhancing coronary artery development and investigating the link between sleep patterns and the risk of coronary artery disease.

"The research we fund is cutting edge and sometimes a lot of people have a hard time wrapping their head around it," said Andrew. "But this study on sleep looked at the largest data set yet and, sure enough, sleep does have an impact on sudden cardiac arrest."

Much of the Gootter-funded research

garners additional funding by the National Institutes of Health and the American Heart Association. "We've had a lot of success as a beginning-stage funder," he said.

The Gootter Foundation continues to donate AEDs to first responders and have them installed where people gather, worship and go to school. The foundation has handed out more than 350 since 2005.

"Until there is a cure for SCD, we know that only an AED and chest compressions can save a life," said Claudine. "I often think that my brother would be with us today if a shock from an AED had been administered within a few minutes of his cardiac arrest."

"When we donate these AEDs, we just don't hand them over," said Andrew. "We actually work with them on getting them trained. And the great thing is, people talk and share, they will teach a friend. That's an important part of our mission still – getting the word out."

The Foundation raises funds for its programs with an annual gala. This year's Feb. 7 event will honor Kwan C. An, founder of Mr. An's and other Tucson restaurants and a major donor to several organizations.

"He's no stranger to SCD and cardiac disease," said Andrew. "He lost both his father and grandfather to cardiac arrest. He suffered it himself at age 57 and was resuscitated by an AED."

"I'm hopeful we won't have to be around forever," he said of the foundation. "I think they will find a cure for SCD one day. That is our goal."

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