

## NEWS RELEASE

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### University of Saint Mary Nursing Student Honored by City of Leavenworth For Saving Child's Life

(Leavenworth, Kan.)— Lifeguard and USM nursing student Blair Tarnawski maintains she was just doing her job June 26 at Leavenworth's Wollman Aquatic Center when she performed CPR on a blue and unresponsive 2-year-old child.

"That may be so," said Alena Swartz's mom, Jennifer Swartz, "but your job saved our little girl's life."

Tarnawski, 19, may be humble about her actions, but Swartz thinks the Saint Mary student deserves all the praise she can get. And so did the city of Leavenworth, which honored Tarnawski and Linda Johnson, a local citizen who discovered the toddler at the bottom of the pool. Tarnawski and Johnson both received city proclamations at the City Commission meeting Tuesday night, July 14.

When Leavenworth Mayor Shay Baker presented Tarnawski her proclamation the crowd gave her a standing ovation and little Alena ran up and gave her a hug.

"Our thanks go out to the Blair and Linda who acted quickly to save this child's life," said Mayor Baker. "Without their actions, the situation could have turned out much differently."

Tarnawski was on duty on a sweltering Friday afternoon. The pool was packed with hundreds of people seeking to beat the heat. Swartz, her husband, and their four children were among the crowd.

The water was extremely cloudy and carried a strong glare on the surface. Conditions were just right for Alena to slip under the water unnoticed.

"It was miscommunication," Swartz said. "I thought Kent had his eye on Alena. He thought I had my eye on her."

Pool patron Linda Johnson was wading through a throng of swimmers when she felt something at her feet. She looked down and saw Alena hovering unconscious near the bottom of the pool. Johnson scooped the girl up, locked in on Tarnawski and started carrying the girl in her direction.

"I tripled whistled, and that means a drowning emergency," Tarnawski said. "And I started chest compressions."

"To be honest, nothing was going through my mind. It went blank. I couldn't see or hear anybody. I was just zoned in, I guess," Tarnawski said.

When Tarnawski began CPR, the child had a heartbeat every three seconds but remained unresponsive. Within 20 seconds, Alena had a heartbeat every second and a half. "The whole process took about four minutes," said Tarnawski. "Eventually, Alena began spitting up the water she had swallowed and became conscious."

“She kept saying Mom, Daddy, I was in the water,” Swartz said. “Blair was amazing, she remained perfectly calm and in control of everything.”

Alena Swartz is the granddaughter of Karen Dessert, a 2003 Saint Mary graduate. Blair Tarnawski is the granddaughter of Ruth Tarnawski, a nurse who attended Saint Mary.

Alena was taken by ambulance to St. John’s Hospital. Doctors had her transferred to Children’s Mercy for overnight observation. Shortly after the incident, Alena was fully awake and aware and chattering away on her second ambulance ride. And she wants to go back to Wollman pool as soon as her family gets the chance, Swartz said.

“One of the ER doctors who saw us right afterwards said had Blair not administered CPR in the manner she did it, she wouldn’t have survived,” Swartz said.

“Blair’s a very intelligent girl and she’s a nursing student, which helped,” said Pam Simpson, the recreation supervisor at Wollman Aquatic Center.

Tarnawski will be a sophomore at USM this fall. She hopes to be a nurse practitioner some day. “I’ve wanted to be a nurse since I was 8-years-old,” she said. “Most of my grandmas are nurses, so it’s in the family. None of that stuff grosses me out, so that’s what I want to do.”

Tarnawski said she felt confident in her CPR ability before the incident occurred. “I had CPR training when I was younger. On a young child, you only use one hand when you do the chest compressions.”

Tarnawski for her part is enjoying the recognition—particularly from her family—but remains humble about the event.

“I think it’s cool, what everyone’s done,” she said. “But I mean I’m a lifeguard. They train us to do that. They train us to prevent drownings and death.”

*The University of Saint Mary is a Catholic co-educational applied liberal arts university founded and sponsored by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. The University of Saint Mary is located at 4100 South 4th Street, Leavenworth, Kan., with additional locations in Overland Park, Shawnee, and Kansas City, Kan. Visit [www.stmary.edu](http://www.stmary.edu) on the web for more information.*

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