A survivor celebration can be a wonderful event for your community. It serves as a commemoration of the opportunity for a second life for the survivor; a time to recognize the bystanders and professionals who played a role in giving the survivor that second chance; and an occasion to raise awareness of sudden cardiac arrest in the community.

The best survivor celebrations focus on the survivors first and foremost, and the rescuers second. They are nondenominational, without agency identification or boundaries, and all inclusive. The survivor’s family, hospital staff, EMS personnel, 911 dispatchers, law enforcement officers, fire department members and bystanders are among the most common attendees. Members of the media are often invited to bring further attention to the issue of sudden cardiac arrest.

continued on pg 2 >>
Survivor celebrations can be held to recognize individual survivors and those who helped them survive, or can be done on an annual or regular basis to recognize groups of survivors and supporters. The following tips are for an event celebrating a number of survivors, but will still help in planning any type of survivor event.

**Planning a celebration**

Like any gathering, it is about the people who attend—not the food, drink, door prizes or entertainment. While it is important to understand that some survivors may choose to decline, ensuring that all survivors have the opportunity to attend if they wish is critical. Here are some suggestions for how to plan the event.

**Several months before the event:**

1. Get help. Don't take this on alone: The more partners in this venture, the better the event, and the more fun it will be along the way. Form a Survivor Celebration Committee and invite stakeholders from your community. Be inclusive and invite any interested survivors, their families and friends; representatives from the local government, hospitals and public safety agencies; business owners; and local media personalities to help you plan your event. Increasing survival is a community effort. The more people you involve, the more powerful your gathering will be.

2. Choose a date. Many survivor celebrations are held in February, which is “Heart Month” and coincides with Valentine’s Day, but there are plenty of reasons to use other dates. For example, October is “Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Month”, and the first week of June is typically “National CPR and AED Awareness Week.” The event doesn't have to be held in conjunction with those awareness efforts, though—often, the anniversary of one of the survivors’ cardiac arrest, or a survivor's birthday, serves as an impetus for choosing a day. The most important thing is to choose a date far enough in advance so that as many people as possible can attend.

3. Inform and invite local hospitals to participate and enlist their support. Sometimes they have the resources to help organize media coverage or print brochures.

4. Identify survivors who will be celebrated. This can be done through local survivor groups as well as EMS agencies and hospitals. While privacy laws prevent these groups from sharing names, they often keep in touch with survivors and can reach out to them. If survivors wish to participate, they can then contact you. Placing ads in local newspapers or posting information on social media is also a great way to reach out to survivors in the community and invite them to participate.

5. Determine the type of celebration you want to host. This will depend on several factors, most notably the budget and the number of attendees. Some options include:

• Formal ceremony with pomp and circumstance

*continued on pg 3*
• wine-and-cheese party
• Sit-down dinner or lunch with educational topics
• Cake and ice cream and a few words from the stakeholders
• A CPR training session with snacks and a few words from survivors

6. Find a venue. Local hospitals, fire departments and corporations in your community may be able to donate the use of an auditorium or banquet room. Schools and community centers may also have space available. You can also consider approaching banquet facilities or hotels and asking for a donated or discounted space.

7. Create an inventory of items or services you’ll need for the event and how you might be able to borrow some or acquire them through donations. Some possible things for the list include:

• Food and drink
• Transportation
• Giveaways or awards
• Signs/Invitations/Banners
• Tableware/Decorations, such as balloons or flowers
• A photographer

You can approach local grocery stores or restaurants, ice cream shops, wineries or coffee shops for food and drink donations. Print shops or office supply stores may help out as well. Consider offering donors a chance to put their logos on printed items, and be sure to thank them at the event. There are resources for creating partnerships and requesting donations on www.lifeaftersca.org.

8. Identify possible speakers for the program. Do not have too many—ideally, there will be one or two main speakers. Possibilities include a survivor, an elected official, a community leader or a respected physician.

9. Form a rough draft of the program:

• Determine if you want to have an honor guard and/or a benediction.

• Consider which survivors will want to tell their stories. If you have several survivors, select only a few stories to share with the audience. Consider printing all the survivors’ stories in a program or booklet if the survivors agree. Make sure the stories come from the survivors and do not contain protected information unless supplied by the individual.

10. Confirm the menu, decorations, music and survivor gifts. Some gift ideas include survivor coins or other commemorative items.

continued on pg 4 >>
The month before the celebration:

11. Contact survivors to confirm addresses.
12. If survivors will be asked to speak, confirm that they are willing and able to do so.
13. Send out invitations (and request RSVPs).
14. Confirm speakers and finalize the program. See www.LifeAfterSCA.org for resources create announcements and event programs.
15. Print the program—be sure to double-check the spellings of names and include sponsors’ logos.
16. Print the program (double-check the spellings of names and include sponsors’ logos).

During the celebration:

17. If members of the media are present, have an event organizer or volunteer assigned to help them set up and arrange interviews with survivors or medical professionals who have agreed to talk to them.
18. Make sure to recognize all the attending survivors individually and, if possible, their rescuers.
19. Schedule time for a photographer to take a group photo of all of the survivors, and survivors with rescuers.
20. Have information available on survivor support, CPR education and other related topics.

After the celebration:

21. Follow up and thank those who helped make your survivor celebration a success.
22. Share photos from your event and survivor stories with your community, again respecting the privacy of those involved.

LifeAfterSCA.org provides resources to help survivors of sudden cardiac arrest and their families. Because every SCA survivor who gets a second chance at life also deserves a second shot at living.