

Mike Waters

Arts Center's Newest Board Member

With a Pulse on What's Important



One of the most recent additions to the Arts Center's Board of Trustees, Mike Waters, has worn numerous hats over the course of his professional life, and his service-driven "retirement" mirrors his career with as many.

His primary career was working for 32 years with Verisk Analytics, a New Jersey-based data and risk analytics company, where Mike retired as a Vice President and Officer.

Growing up, Mike watched his father serve as a volunteer firefighter in the town of Vestal, New York, and, as a result, became interested in service to others from a young age. The day Mike turned 18, he walked into the local fire department and volunteered. Over the years, he focused his regular studies with fire protection education.

Interestingly, Mike's college years at the University of Maryland in College Park were made more unique by his housing situation. Rather than living in a campus dorm or frat house, Mike resided and worked as a firefighter at Fire Station 1 in downtown Silver Spring, providing an up-close experience of what these brave firefighters did on a daily basis, further

attuning him to the world of fire protection, emergency safety, and serving others.

Layered atop his business responsibilities, Mike served over a 25-year span as a volunteer fire department member/officer throughout upstate New York, Maryland, suburban Philadelphia, and as Fire Chief and Fire Commissioner in the district located in central NJ.

One cold January morning in 2008 at Fire Station 55, in Jackson, New Jersey, after working out in the station's gym and on the way home, Mike had a nagging sense that something was wrong physically. After pulling over in a parking lot, he contemplated his options. "I had three choices: I could head home, which was about 8 minutes away, call for help in the parking lot, or go back to the firehouse." He chose the latter, and expressed his unease to his good friend, Ken Mallette, who was in the gym: "I'm just not feeling right. I need to go sit down." Ken wisely called 911, which put the wheels rapidly in motion. First on the scene was a police officer who administered oxygen, immediately followed by an ambulance.

On the ride to Mike's choice of hospital, paramedics said they didn't like what they were seeing and rerouted him to a closer facility. Though Mike didn't feel intense pain at this point, he said instead it was as if "someone let the air out of me." Soon after, Mike coded.

CPR is best not administered in a moving vehicle so they pulled over. As he came back to consciousness -- and, not hyperbolically, back to life -- he heard, "Mike stay with us, open your eyes." Now, the pain was intense. They rushed him to the closest hospital. Paramedics had to use the defibrillator twice to restart his heart. Once, Mike was in the ER, he coded a third time.

The blockage they found required more sophisticated care. Needing to airlift Mike to Newark's Beth Israel Medical Center, the helicopter came from Philadelphia for his transport. Upon arrival to Newark and before the stretcher was completely out of the helicopter, Mike told the flight crew, "Just so you know, I'm a Giants fan." The Philadelphia team said, "good thing you waited to tell us."

The invasive cardiologist was called off the tennis court for surgery and a stent was put in. Amazingly, by the middle of the day, Mike was recovering, watching a Giants game from his hospital bed, and only a few days after that, was home.

"Everyone who had to be there for me that day was. I was very fortunate," Mike said.

Only 10% of all sudden cardiac attack victims survive neurologically intact. Fortunately for Mike, he had his cardiac arrest while in the ambulance, with equipment at hand, since in these cases, timing is everything.

Mike explained, "Training programs implemented by the Hilton Head Fire & Rescue have resulted in a wildly impressive cardiac arrest survival rate of 70% here on the island. That's because of the efforts associated with the Fire & Rescue team, headed by Tom Bouthillet, EMS Battalion Chief."

What they've done with attention to training, not only of EMS personnel but of civilians, saves lives. Thanks to Mike's involvement with the Arts Center, and rescue background, he encouraged the organization to implement staff training, which was done in January this year [see side bar].

"I was given the opportunity to live. It's my mission to make sure we get the word out to train as many people as possible. Without the rescue and medical personnel that day, when and where they were, I wouldn't be here."

As it is, Mike and Ann Waters are proud of their two adult children, one son, an engineer who lives in Virginia, and a daughter, who resides in Bluffton. Their daughter has two small boys, and those grandkids were a major impetus for Mike and Ann to move to the island.

Since moving here they have become immersed in several volunteer activities. Ann is involved with the Women's Association of Hilton Head Island, St. Francis By-the-Sea Thrift Shop, and Coastal Discovery Museum. Mike even works as a Background Actor in and around the Savannah area, and is involved with several community-level organizations including SCORE of the

Lowcountry, the Knights of Columbus, and the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office.

The Waters are avid supporters of the Arts Center, and we welcome Mike "wholeheartedly" to the Board of Trustees.

Staff Safety Training

NEW LIFE-SAVING DEVICES INSTALLED IN ARTS CENTER

Thanks to the generosity of trustees David Borghesi, Rich Speer and Mike Waters, Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) are now installed throughout the Arts Center along with three bleeding control stations.

As Mike's story attests, AEDs can help save lives in the event of sudden cardiac arrest until medical personnel arrive on the scene.

"Through Mike's diligence in working with Battalion Chief Tom Bouthillet of Hilton Head Island Fire & Rescue EMS, a special training was held for staff on January 11. It was the first time the training encompassed AED, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), and bleeding control.

"We're very grateful that seventeen staff members are now certified, along with other staff and volunteers who previously had their certification in the life-saving techniques," explained Sr. Vice President and COO Jeffrey Reeves.



Pictured Above:

Captain Tina Sanders, Hilton Head Fire/Rescue; Kelly Bouthillet, Acute Care Nurse Practitioner; Mike Waters, Arts Center Trustee; EMS Battalion Chief Tom Bouthillet, Hilton Head Fire/Rescue