

S. Tahoe man credits CalStar with saving his life

By Mike Nichols

If anyone wants to know the benefit of the CalStar Membership Program, all they have to do is talk to longtime members Mike and Sally Neitling of South Lake Tahoe. Mike Neitling used CalStar's services twice in 2012, perhaps saving his life, and his membership saved him from any out-of-pocket costs associated with the two flights.

Neitling, 61, was finishing up his vacation on Nov. 2, 2012, and wanted to complete some chores at his home before returning to work. One of those chores was to wash the outside windows of his house. Home alone at the time, he grabbed a ladder, along with some cleaning materials, and climbed up to the second floor of the three-story home. In an instant, the bottom of the ladder slipped and Neitling was abruptly heading for the cement driveway below.

"I didn't want to land on my head, so I sort of twisted around and I ended up landing on my backside," he said. "I knew I was in trouble because I was in excruciating pain and although I could move around a bit, I couldn't stand."



CalStar pilot Kris Hunt, from left, flight nurse Ted

Langevin, Mike Neitling and
flight nurse Stephen Poehls.
Photo/Provided

Neitling yelled out, but no one could hear him. Finally after about 10 minutes, several public utility workers came to his aid. They quickly called 911 and within minutes a ground ambulance took Neitling to Barton Memorial Hospital. His physicians quickly diagnosed Neitling with a broken pelvis, and even worse he had severed an artery inside the pelvis and he was bleeding heavily internally.

“My blood pressure dropped to 50 over 30,” he said. “I asked a physician if I was bleeding out, and he didn’t answer me. I think I already knew the answer.”

Neitling was given four pints of blood at Barton and a call was put into to CalStar 6 in South Lake Tahoe to transport him to Renown Medical Center in Reno.

The CalStar flight crew, including pilot Kris Hunt and flight nurses Ted Langevin and Stephen Poehls, arrived within minutes and loaded Neitling into the helicopter. During the flight to Renown, Langevin and Poehls gave Neitling an additional two pints of blood.

“The flight crew was terrific,” he said. “They kept me updated all the way to Renown. It was very clear to me that they were not only very caring people, but also people who truly knew what they were doing.”

Neitling reflects today that had it not been for CalStar, he may not have survived.

“If I would have had to be transported by ground ambulance, it would have taken about an hour and 15 or 20 minutes and I probably would not have made it.”

The CalStar flight from Barton to Renown took 20 minutes.

Once at Renown, Neitling was given two more pints of blood and physicians worked to fix the ruptured artery. They were successful in stopping the bleeding, and the next day Neitling was in surgery to have a metal plate inserted to secure his pelvis.

After recovering from surgery, Neitling spent a week at Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center for physical therapy.

“They predicted I would be in a wheelchair for about 45 days, and they wanted to make sure I would be able to handle it. I was supposed to be at the center for two weeks, but I worked hard and was out in a week.”

Neitling has now returned to work as a surveillance supervisor at Harrah’s and Harveys Lake Tahoe.

“If it were not for CalStar, along with some excellent medical care, I probably wouldn’t be here today,” he said.

This was the second time in a year that Neitling was flown by CalStar. In July 2012 he was camping with friends and family on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe when his heart rate suddenly jumped to about 180 beats per minute. Because he had experienced previous heart issues, he was transported by ground ambulance to Barton Memorial Hospital, and subsequently taken by CalStar to Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center for observation. He was subsequently released with no serious health ramifications.

Neitling and his wife, Sally, have lived in South Lake Tahoe for 40 years.

“About 10 years ago, we knew we wanted to become CalStar members,” Neitling said. “I ski, I golf and I love the outdoors,” he said. Among other things, he is a part-time ski instructor at Heavenly Mountain Resort. “The membership seemed to be an excellent investment.”

Sally Neitling expressed her appreciation to CalStar as well. "Please know that we are so grateful for your skill and knowledge in saving [Mike]," she said. "I want to offer many thanks to all of you for the flight and for being here in Tahoe."

Mike Nichols is the director of Development and Outreach for CalStar.