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KDOT snow crews play key role in saving heart attack patient

A Scott County man who suffered a heart attack during the Dec. 19-20 blizzard may not be alive today if not for the heroics of Kansas Department of Transportation snow crews.

When Chad Griffith, 44, a farmer/rancher and father of four, had a heart attack at 9:45 p.m. Dec. 19, he needed to get to the closest hospital that could perform life-saving surgery as quickly as possible. But that was Hays Medical Center, 120 miles away, and air ambulances were grounded. As the blizzard worsened and 12 to 15 inches of snow piled up, a number of state roads were being closed, limiting travel options. That's when workers at Scott County Ambulance called KDOT for help.

Area Superintendent Jerry Glassman at KDOT's Oakley office took the call and immediately began coordinating with other superintendents to arrange for KDOT snowplows to clear the way and lead the ambulance to Hays. Four different snow plows shared the escort duty as the ambulance traveled from one KDOT area to the next. Five-and-a-half hours after it began the journey, the ambulance reached the hospital. Within minutes Griffith was in surgery.

Griffith, who had been Christmas shopping in Garden City with his wife earlier in the day, had "a 99 percent blockage in the artery of the heart, (a condition) commonly known as the 'widow maker.' His only chance at survival was getting to a larger facility with cardiologists," Griffith's physician, Dr. Elizabeth Hineman, wrote in a message to KDOT.

“Because of you, he made it, as did my staff, and I will forever be grateful for the service you provided.”

Doctors at the Hays hospital performed a heart catheterization on Griffith and inserted a stent. He was home several days before Christmas and is now back tending to his cattle, preparing for calving.

“I think a lot of times we take those guys for granted. They went above and beyond because that blizzard was just raging,” Griffith said.

“The doctors, the EMTs and the KDOT guys are just giant people to me. They all played a role in saving my life.”

([Photos](#) of Chad Griffith and some of the crews who helped get his ambulance to Hays are posted on KDOT’s Flickr account and may be downloaded. A [video](#) of the collaborative effort is posted on the agency’s YouTube channel.)

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