

# State employee's tax call saves man's life

By Charlie Pearl  
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An Adair County man says Frankfort's Natalie Brown, a state Department of Revenue employee, saved his life when she returned a phone call about his state income tax bill.

Earl Phillips, 60, who lives near Green River Lake, said he received a tax notice in late May with Brown's name and phone number.

He called Brown's number on May 25. "Thankfully," he says, Brown didn't return his call until the next morning.

Phillips, who repairs and maintains welding equipment in a job that requires extensive traveling, says he's an early riser.

"I had finished washing dishes after breakfast and had gone to the den to drink a cup of coffee," Phillips told The State Journal by phone Saturday.

"I started having a pain in my arm, but it was a dull pain so I thought it would go away."

Initially he thought he must have pulled a muscle in his arm, but then the pain moved into his chest and the back of his neck.

"Then the phone rang and it was Natalie Brown, saying she was returning my call," Phillips said. "I told her she was going to have to call me back because I thought I was having a heart attack.

"When I said that, I assumed she would just think I was somebody trying to avoid the tax issue. But she took me seriously. I think she understood by the tone of my voice I was being honest."

Brown, 23, said she noticed he was breathing heavily and seemed ill.

She asked him if he needed her to call an ambulance.

Phillips said he didn't want to tell a complete stranger that he needed help, but she verified his address and then called Adair County 911.

“I didn’t really expect her to call,” Phillips said. “A lot of people don’t want to get involved in something like that. Most people would be glad just to get off the phone and forget it.

“But she’s a trooper. She saved my life.”

An emergency medical crew took Phillips to the Columbia hospital. Then he was flown to Norton Audubon Hospital in Louisville where he immediately had surgery.

Doctors inserted a stent in one of his arteries where Phillips said he had a 90 percent blockage.

Meanwhile Brown spent the next several days worried about Phillips. She left a message on his phone.

Phillips was released two days after being admitted and returned home. Three days later he called Brown to thank her.

Phillips said he had no history of heart problems and had never had any serious illnesses until his May 26 heart attack. He lives alone.

“My mother had died just a few weeks earlier from a brain aneurysm,” Phillips said.

Saturday afternoon Phillips said, “I’m feeling good. I think I’m over it. I still have the stent. I just need to do what my doctor says.”

Phillips said he hopes Brown “gets an award for what she did. I hope other people follow her example.”

Brown’s boss, Bruce Nix, director of Individual Income Tax for the Department of Revenue, said it’s the first time in his 21 years with the department that he can recall that a revenue employee may have saved the life of a taxpayer.

Brown said Saturday she “would hope anybody would do the same thing in that situation.

“It’s always better to be safe than sorry. You can’t take a gamble or risk like that. You have to make the call.

“I’m just glad he got the help he needed and that he’s back home and doing well.”

A Frankfort native and a 2005 Franklin County High School graduate, Brown started working for the Department of Revenue in August 2009, shortly after graduating from Morehead State University.

“I love my job and the people I work with,” Brown said. “It’s just a good environment to be in, and I like to help people anyway I can.”

Gov. Steve Beshear praised Brown’s dedication Friday.