



COURTESY PHOTO

Kerry Lewis and surrogate Christina Lynn expect the arrival of Ms. Lewis' baby daughter in about three weeks.

Gift of life shared between two Charlotte County nurses

BY KATHY GREY

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It started with a conversation between two nurses working at Fawcett Memorial Hospital. The two women had become friends, sharing their lives, hopes and dreams. The dream of one woman had been realized twofold, with the birth of her two children. The other woman's dream seemed that it might never materialize.

As she approached the age of 44, nurse Kerry Lewis felt she had a lot of love to give a child and began exploring options for becoming a mother. However, Ms. Lewis' history of reproductive problems ended in hysterectomy, and it seemed fated that her dream of motherhood might never be realized.

Still, she researched options, including adoption. But that avenue proved to be daunting and discouraging for the single woman. It was then that she was referred to Dr. Craig Sweet, a reproductive endocrinologist and medical director of Specialists in Reproductive Medicine and Surgery in Fort Myers. Dr. Sweet, who has practiced in the field of fertility for 21 years, explained to the hopeful mother about embryo donation and surrogacy.

Through a process called cryopreservation (embryo freezing), excess embryos resulting from in vitro fertilization are stored. When genetic parents elect not to use remaining embryos, they may choose to donate the embryos to infertile patients.

Ms. Lewis chose to accept donated

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COURTESY PHOTO

Birdie, a performer on Fort Myers Beach, is offering a reward for the return of his ventriloquist dummy Clarence.

FORT MYERS BEACH PERFORMER'S SHOW GOES ON WITHOUT DOLL

BY BILL CORNWELL

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BIRDIE AND CLARENCE. WHAT A pair. Might even say they were made for each other (and if you did say that, you'd be about half right).

For almost three decades, Birdie and Clarence traveled the United States and Europe, playing towns big and small. Mostly small. Birdie did Japan solo, but he says there was a reason: "Clarence doesn't speak Japanese." They've had bookings at theme parks and aboard cruise ships. They have what is known in the biz as a "specialty act."

Birdie and Clarence never hit the

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COURTESY PHOTO

Mother-to-be Kerry Lewis attends Christina Lynn's prenatal appointments as she experiences the pregnancy first hand.

MOMS

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embryos and find a surrogate.

Christina Lynn, a friend and nursing colleague of Ms. Lewis, offered to be the surrogate. Not only could Ms. Lewis' dreams of motherhood be realized, the bond between the two women meant that Ms. Lewis could experience the pregnancy day by day alongside her surrogate and friend.

Less than two weeks after Dr. Sweet transferred the donated embryos into Mrs. Lynn, Ms. Lewis received the news that she had been hoping for: Mrs. Lynn was pregnant.

"It was amazing to learn that Christina was pregnant and I would soon be a mother," Ms. Lewis said. "I'm grateful to Christina for carrying my child and to Dr. Sweet and the miracle of modern medicine. Embryo donation is truly a gift of life."

Ms. Lewis has been a dutiful expectant mother, attending prenatal appointments with Mrs. Lynn and speaking with her daily about the progress of her daughter.

Dr. Sweet began the embryo donation program from his Fort Myers practice in 2001, following a conference with other fertility specialists. "We were all surprised that people would abandon their embryos. Shortly after that we started our embryo donation program.

"This is a potential life," Dr. Sweet said. "We feel they deserve an intermediate level of respect. And so, we've almost become embryo advocates."

Dr. Sweet hastens to point out that the urgency to preserve a potential life doesn't stem from religious conviction; rather, "It comes from our professional dedication to help create families."

Dr. Sweet's practice doesn't offer an option for embryo destruction. The optimal choice is for the embryos to be used by donating parents. "The second-best choice," Dr. Sweet said, "is for embryos to be donated to a needy individual or couple."

So passionate is Dr. Sweet's mission, he has hired an investigator to track down the parents of abandoned embryos. All fees are waived if the parents either use the embryos themselves or donate them. He is also preparing to

in the know

>> What: "The Fertility Chase" on WE-TV will cover the topic of embryo donation and surrogacy, featuring Southwest Florida fertility specialist Dr. Craig Sweet and his clients, including Charlotte County's Christina Lynn and Kerry Lewis

>> When: 8:30 to 9 a.m. Saturday, May 15.

>> Where: WE-TV, the Women's Entertainment cable television network

>> Info: www.dreamababy.com

>> Other: Check local listings for WE-TV channel selection.


launch an entity that will operate separately from his practice, Embryo Donation International.

But it's his remarkably successful fertility practice that caught the attention of producers from WE-TV. Dr. Sweet's success stories will be chronicled nationally on WE-TV at 8:30 a.m. Saturday, May 15. One of the stories will be about two Charlotte County nurses — Ms. Lewis and Mrs. Lynn — who bonded as friends and now anticipate the birth of a little girl, a miracle of medicine. ■

— *For more information about Dr. Craig R. Sweet and Specialists in Reproductive Medicine and Surgery, visit www.dreamababy.com or www.sweetfertility.com.*



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