

NICU

From page 1

arteries are no thicker than the eye of a needle is gross exaggeration.

And perhaps most unusual of all is this: Each appears to be loved in every full minute of every long hour of every momentous day by a clan of surrogate mothers — mothers mostly, since 88 of the 90 nurses among a devoted staff of 150 are women. Few in this world can ever say that.

These nurses are the elite corps of the NICU, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at The Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida at HealthPark, the campus of Lee Memorial Health System in South Fort Myers. The Children's Hospital and its NICU serve families from all five counties in the region — Collier, Lee, Charlotte, Glades and Hendry.

Throughout the five rooms of this off-limits, 48-bed unit, babies cling to life in conditions defined as Level 3 and Level 2 (slightly less fragile). Those for whom things have gone very well graduate to the NICU Progressive Room, which means they'll likely soon go home.

Around them work the nurses, nurse practitioners, doctors of various stripes (including a neonatal ophthalmologist), respiratory therapists and occupational therapists, who can help shape and loosen little bodies that would normally do so alone and naturally, while suspended in amniotic fluid. There are even social workers and case managers, all devoted to these children.

Or perhaps they're devoted to something more than these children, suggests one nurse, Nancy Scribner. "I take the long view," she explains. "We aren't trying to save just one life, we're try-

ing to save many: the parents who love this child, the future generations — an entire history — that this child might represent.

"It's like an old parable, where three men were laying bricks. When asked what they were doing, the first man said, 'I'm laying bricks.' The second man said, 'I'm earning a living.' And the third man said, 'I'm building a church.'"

A singular breed, called to their unit

Some NICU babies begin the arduous climb toward normality — toward those someday churches — as early as 23 or 24 weeks after conception, weighing as little as a pound or a pound plus a few ounces. For them, life may never be easy. Children who once would have died when delivered at 28 or 30 weeks are now pretty good bets to come out of the NICU and grow into beautiful, fully capable young people. Their pictures crowd a bulletin board in the unit, gazing out in an unassailable proof that this is all worth it.

No one receives better care — care of mind and heart — than these babies. Even statistics (which usually have so little to do with love) bear it out: The Children's Hospital NICU has had the lowest mortality and morbidity rates of any NICU in the state of Florida two years running, says Michelle Waddell, herself a 20-year NICU nurse and the unit director.

Trained specifically for Level 3 with hyper-mentoring by veterans on the NICU, Mrs. Waddell's nurses complete year-long internships — much of that time spent in the unit — that follow their four-year nursing degrees.

The intensity helps shape them, and define them, as a singular breed. These nurses arrived at the NICU because they were called to it, they say. Those



JIM MCLAUGHLIN/FLORIDA WEEKLY
NICU nurse Aubrey Brown, left, stands by as Bryan and Danielle Lee check on their 2-month old son, Caleb, who weighed 1 pound and 7 ounces at birth.

who come and aren't called to the unique work quickly discover the fact, and leave.

Why?
"It's a very scary world here," replies Mrs. Waddell, who then breaks into quiet laughter.

"People think sometimes we sit around in rocking chairs, rocking babies," adds Chris Lee, another 20-year veteran of the NICU. "No, not quite."

Once on the NICU, they tend to remain for decades. Turnover is very low. This is a life's work, not just a day's job.

Combining hands, hearts and skill

"I could never peel people off the pavement or work in oncology," explains Mrs. Scribner, the church builder. Tall

and slender, her long fingers stretch almost the length of a patient's torso. "And I quickly found out (21 years ago when she came out of nursing school) that pediatrics was NOT what I wanted. This is what I wanted — it's the only thing I want to do. I think most of us would say we're called to it."

About five minutes later, Mrs. Scribner reappears, her eyes bright, the cloud of auburn hair that framed her head now covered. A mask hangs from her uniform that will soon hide her nearly dazzling smile — juiced, perhaps, with a touch of adrenalin: One of the coded bells has rung.

"I'm going to a stat C-section — I'm off to save a life," she announces before she disappears. (An NICU nurse is called for every premature C-section, in case

Free Prosperity Now

Checking

Powered by BancVue

EARN Prosperity Rates

4.01% APY*

on your balance of \$.01-\$50,000

Plus ATM Fee Refunds Nationwide!**




239-303-7310 | PantherCommunityBank.com

To Earn the Prosperity Rates, Perform the Following Each Cycle:

1. Make 12 Debit Card Transactions
2. One Direct Deposit or two ACH auto debits and
3. Enroll and receive electronic statements

*4.01% Annual Percentage Yield (APY) paid on balances between one penny and \$50,000, and 1.01% APY paid on all amounts above \$50,000 each cycle the minimum requirements are met. If you do not meet the requirements per cycle, your account will still function as a free checking account earning 0.10% APY; however, it will not receive ATM refunds for that time period. Rates as of January 5, 2009. We may change the interest rate and APY at any time after the account is opened. No Minimum Balance Required. However you must deposit a minimum of \$100 to open this account. Available to Personal Accounts only. No monthly service charge.

**ATM fee refunds up to \$20 per cycle if requirements are met.





THE MARKET HAS CHANGED


WHY HASN'T YOUR FINANCIAL PLAN?

Not all advisors suggest you do nothing. Would you like to hear one with good ideas? Call to reserve a place at our next workshop.


Financial Advisors



Terri-Ann Lindo



Steven A. Bernstein



Stephen E. Ridgely

RAYMOND JAMES®

FINANCIAL SERVICES, INC.
Member FINRA/SIPC

Individual solutions from independent advisors

14440 Metropolis Ave., Ste. 102
Ft Myers, FL 33912
(239)-694-7537