

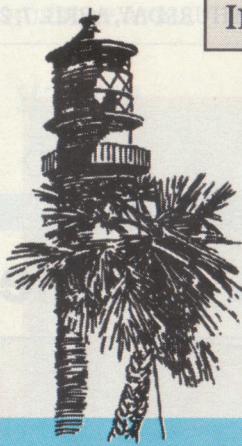
INSIDE:

Police embark
on Tour de Force...
p. 2

Civic Center
Park update...
p. 12

Putting KB on
virtual map...
p. 13

Miami Open
wrap-up
p. 16



THE ISLANDER NEWS

SINCE
1966

THE LIFE & TIMES OF KEY BISCAIYNE, FLORIDA

WWW.ISLANDERNEWS.COM



VOLUME 49, NO. 14

THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 2016

\$1.25

Helm.
BANK USA
EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

LOANS TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

Residential Loans - Second Homes - Jumbo Loans
Auto Loans

Member
FDIC

999 Brickell Ave. Miami FL 33131 • (305) 379-4356 • www.helmbankusa.com



DELI BAKERY & MARKET
EAT IN/TAKE OUT
COMFORT
ORGANIC PRODUCE
FOODS
CHEESE & WINE



EAT WELL · ENJOY LOCAL

Main Store: 91 Harbor Dr, Key Biscayne
Key Colony: 235 Crandon Blvd. Suite 4
Order Online - We cater - We deliver

Fundraiser Saturday will assist families in their NICU journey

By: KELLY JOSEPHSEN

kjosephsen@islandernews.com

For Nichole Aldrich, it was a shortage of wheelchairs, which forced her to wait for hours to be taken to the Jackson Memorial Hospital NICU to spend the precious little time she had with her son Matthew, born at 25-and-a-half weeks.

For Beth Simonton, it was too few chairs at South Miami Hospital, leaving her and other families with nowhere to sit when they were granted time with their babies in intensive care.

For other families, it's the cost of parking. Or travel, or hotel rooms. Or finding care for an older sibling, or how to safely store breast milk, or getting laundry done to NICU specifications.

When a family finds themselves in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit with a critically ill baby, it's any number of things

that can make an already devastating experience even harder – and that's exactly the point behind ICU Baby, a charity Aldrich and Simonton started based on their own experiences in hopes of making a difference for families all over South Florida.

"Whatever we can do, we want to do. We really want to eliminate any barriers, whether they be financial, psychological, emotional, that prevent a family from visiting their child," Aldrich said. "We want parents to be able to be with their babies in the NICU."

To support that mission, ICU Baby plans a fundraiser this Saturday, April 9 at 8 p.m. at a private home. The "Raising the Stakes Casino Night" will feature cocktails, food stations, music, casino games, and an illusionist/magician. Guests will

See **NICU** p.8



Photo courtesy ICU Baby

ICU Baby, an organization with Key Biscayne roots, helps families navigate the experience of having a baby in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. The group is holding a fundraiser Saturday.



ISLAND NEWS

WWW.ISLANDERNEWS.COM

SINCE
1966



cont. from p.1

NICU

be able to use their casino winnings to buy raffle tickets to win a two-night stay at the Ritz-Carlton, Puerto Rico.

Tickets are \$100 and all money raised goes directly to the cause. Tickets are available at the door or at www.icubaby.org; more details on the event are also available on the website.

“So far we’ve been reaching out to friends and family for support, and now we’re trying to make more people aware of the organization. We’re trying to spread our wings,” Aldrich said. “We want people to have fun and learn more about our organization.”

ICU Baby got started after Simonton’s son, who is 2 in May, spent a week in the NICU at South Miami Hospital. “It was a very trying, difficult time when she couldn’t take him right home,” Aldrich said, noting while the family is eternally grateful for the care their son received, “One thing that bothered her is when she visited his isolette, there weren’t enough chairs for parents to sit down. It may sound crazy, but when she started this, her mission was just to buy chairs.”

Simonton held a fundraiser and raised money to buy more chairs to donate to the hospital. “She realized, ‘I shouldn’t stop here,’” Aldrich said.

And she certainly didn’t. When Simonton learned of Aldrich’s NICU experience, she asked her friend to help her take ICU Baby to the next level.

Aldrich said it was both a difficult and easy decision to get involved.

“I never thought I’d step back in an NICU again – it was so difficult,” she said. “It was a traumatic experience. I was in a fog. I never expected to be there, and then it happened.”

But when Simonton talked to her about expanding ICU Baby’s mission, Aldrich, who also has an 8-year-old daughter and 5-year-old twins, was intrigued. “I wanted to do something to honor Matthew’s memory, and do something for other families who are going through what I went through – and hopefully make their experience better than mine.”

Matthew was at Jackson Memorial. Aldrich, while praising the doctors and nurses, noted there were issues at the hospital that she knew she could help resolve.

“While Beth didn’t have chairs, the challenge I had was I wasn’t allowed to visit my son without being taken to the NICU in a



Photo courtesy ICU Baby

ICU Baby provides Preemie Packs that give families the essentials for life in the NICU, such as water bottles, journals to record questions and milestones, and hand-knitted blankets.

wheelchair, and there weren’t enough wheelchairs,” she said. “I would wait for hours, and those hours, when I had precious little time, made a huge difference.”

Bottom line, she said, “There should be no barriers for a family to visit their baby.”

And that is exactly what she and Simonton have set about accomplishing. “Our mission is very broad: to support families who have babies in local NICUs,” Aldrich said. “We want to make it as easy as possible for parents to be there, and once they’re there, we want to help improve their experience.”

To do so, they’ve started a pair of programs, both of which Saturday’s fundraiser will support.

In South Miami, hospital officials encouraged them to put together a “Preemie Pack,” basically a diaper bag filled with NICU necessities.

Aldrich noted parents who have their babies too early often haven’t had time to pack a hospital bag or have a baby shower – so they don’t have all the essentials a new baby, especially a medically vulnerable one, requires. “And the last thing they want to do is run to Target to try to find things,” she said.

Enter the Preemie Pack: each bag has needed items like coolers for breast milk, water bottles to help nursing moms get plenty of fluid, and laundry bags that facilitate strict NICU protocol; plus thoughtful extras like disposable cameras so nurses can take pictures of the babies when the family isn’t there, Miami Children’s Museum passes for older siblings, a journal to record milestones and questions, and booties, blankets and hats knitted by members of a local church.

Simonton and Aldrich personally deliver the bags, giving the families not only items they need, but a familiar face to reach out to with questions and concerns. They also host monthly “Suppers of Support” with the same goal in mind, and through a partnership with Baby K’tan deliver the company’s signature baby carriers to each family when they finally get to take their baby home.

All babies born at 32 weeks or less who are in South Miami Hospital’s NICU for at least four weeks receive a Preemie Pack. Since November 2015, ICU Baby has delivered over 50 bags; the need at South Miami Hospital is about 120 bags a year.

Meanwhile, over at Jackson Memorial, ICU Baby has focused on providing the “Kangaroo Covers” that allow parents to provide “kangaroo care” – the skin-to-skin contact that is essential for bonding and development – to their preemies.

“There have been a lot of budget cuts, and they’re not about to provide the Kangaroo Cover,” Aldrich said. “We’re donating them

for every baby, as long as their doctors clear them for skin-to-skin care.”

They’re donating the covers at Jackson already, and plan to start at South Miami in May. Also in May, they’ll bring the Preemie Packs to Jackson, and are currently in the process of working with hospital officials to determine what families there need most.

The list can be extensive: Aldrich noted families come to Jackson and South Miami from all over South Florida because they are Level 3 NICUs – i.e. they treat the most critical babies – and not every community has a Level 3 facility. Therefore, needs can include lodging, help with siblings, money for travel expenses, or even financial assistance to compensate for time off work.

Fortunately, ICU Baby is hitting its stride to provide much-needed assistance.

“I feel like we’ve come a long way in a year,” Aldrich said. “We’re very passionate about what we’re doing, because we’ve both been there.”

They joined forces with the Key Biscayne Community Foundation after Aldrich and Simonton got to know KBCF Executive Director Melissa McCaughan-White, allowing ICU Baby to access the Foundation’s invaluable administrative support. Now, with Raising the Stakes, they’re doing their first large-scale gala, with plans to make it an annual event.

They’re also keeping in close contact with the hospitals and families they help to find out what else they need and how they can improve their services.

Aldrich said she and Simonton look forward to continuing to help families during what can be one of the most trying time of their lives – and noted for her personally, the journey is also one of honoring and remembering little Matthew.

“It has been difficult going back there, but I want to help others,” she said. “Even if we make one small difference in their experience, it means a lot, even just to let them know there are people thinking about them. We know the challenges they are facing.”