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In Andrea's case, the gloomy forecast thankfully did not come true. And the Volpes credited the collective professional dedication of the Providence NICU medical staff, a hospital support group

Veronica proves miracles do happen

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Still haunting Richard and Leslie Helppie after more than 11 years are the myriad sights and sounds they experienced for months while their daughter Veronica fought for life in William Beaumont Hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

There were sights of tiny micro-preemie infants being poked and prodded as they barked in makeshift womb. And sounds of buzzers, alarms and beepers, notifying NICU attendants about any emergency situations.

"Whenever that stuff would go off, it would make a beeping sound," said Richard Helppie, sitting with his wife and children in the living room of their West Bloomfield home. "Just like at McDonald's when the fire alarm goes off, we'd be at McDonald's and the beeper'd go off and we'd start running. We thought Veronica was in trouble."

But she wasn't, not anymore. Their third of four children pulled off what is becoming a modern miracle of modern medicine: Veronica was born Aug. 5, 1984 via emergency C-section, just 27 weeks gestation, weighing 2-pounds, 8-ounces. Today, she is a tough 79-pound perfectionist who beats her dad at arm wrestling and also masters the uneven parallel bars in gymnastics.

"She tried to stand on her head before she tried to walk," Richard said, laughing. "That was her only abnormality."

Taking a serious turn, he emphasized his daughter and other babies like her have a chance to live normal lives because of advanced medicine and dedicated

doctors and nurses in American hospitals.

parents in the unit and from the congregation at St. John's Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills.

"They said prayers for us, peo-

ple brought meals over to us because I was going to the hospital all the time. They watched Anthony. It meant a lot to us," Lora said.

Meanwhile, the Helppies do realize that all is not always so well with these micropremies in NICU's all over the United States — and that they were fortunate in Veronica's situation. In fact, three newborns died in the Beaumont unit during the three months that Veronica was there.

"There's no denying that there are children with handicaps and dysfunctions because of their premature birth," Richard said. "So there's no guarantee a child is going to be perfect or not. You don't have that, really, in any pregnancy."

But they disagree with any knee-jerk decisions to not try and save a young life merely because it began 14 or 15 weeks early.

"It's difficult for anyone to say a certain level of prematurity doesn't have a chance, or a certain condition doesn't have a chance. You just... don't... know," he said, emphasizing every word.

Hard to predict

In Veronica's own case, the crystal ball peered into by doctors certainly was cloudy at best.

"They really didn't give us much hope of her surviving," Richard said, flipping through a picture book recapturing those trying times. "They thought she'd be about a pound and a half. Her lungs weren't developed at all. They were pushing oxygen down her at 75 reps a minute. Her heart

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