

Veronica from page 14A

valves were not closing and they hooked her up to every tube imaginable. Basically, we prayed and waited."

When asked what got them through the typical hospital roller-coaster ride that premature parents endure, Leslie Helppie agreed that it was faith — along with the medical care provided by Beaumont Dr. Karen Hufnagel and a team of NICU nurses.

Richard, meanwhile, credited Pastor William Grafe of St. Marks Lutheran Church in Commerce Township and a congregation "that prayed every week she was there."

"We believed in the care,"

Leslie said. "Dr. Hufnagel and the neonatal staff. They were excellent in there."

Problem occurred

According to Leslie, the medical problem that precipitated the emergency Cesarean was a dramatic loss of amniotic fluid, and concurrent acceleration of Veronica's heart rate.

When she began having contractions late on Aug. 4, 1984, the decision to conduct an ultrasound was made. "But there was no water to have an ultrasound done. That's when we began getting nervous..." They (doctors) said, "We have to take her now or we might lose her."

"They began talking to us about 'negative' possibilities," Leslie added, quietly.

Such as their child being born with mental and/or physical handicaps. The Helppies already had had some personal experience in that realm: their second child, Amanda, 14, was born with slight cerebral palsy. (She is only impacted physically, bothered by a limp — and is a top student at Crenbrook Kingswood).

Tuned in to the disabled because of Amanda, the Helppies became involved at the "Physically or Otherwise Health Impaired" center in Waterford, where their oldest daughter had attended. While volunteering at POHI, they saw many examples of children not nearly as fortunate.

"They were kids basically found to not be trainable," Richard said, noting that when Ver-

onica's situation arose, "all those images" returned.

"We thought, we would have a baby with severe brain damage, and would we be able to deal with this," he said.

Costly procedures

Of course, their worst fears were never realized. But it took \$150,000 in 1984 dollars; other medical setbacks (surgery two weeks into her life to close heart valves; she was hooked up to a monitor for the first year at home, when nurses regularly visited), and additional physician's bills before the Helppies could breathe even the most remote sigh of relief.

"You amortize that over a lifetime, over a 70-to-80-year life and that's nothing," Richard said. "It's pennies a day and look what you get?"

In their words, they got a "con-

queror," a "survivor."

They also got a pretty typical kid.

"Veronica is not only normal," Richard said. "At this stage of her life she's excelling in academics, in athletics. She has many friends, a strong religious life. She keeps her room impeccably clean. She might not be normal."

The Brookside Elementary School student listens to Amy Grant and Sheryl Crow, watches Lois & Clark, goes to gymnastics practice four times a week and generally has a happy outlook on life: "Unless I look at that book."

Leslie said Veronica simply "doesn't like" looking at pictures of her in the NICU unit. "It's really hard for her to accept."

Looks to future

Yet, according to Veronica, she knows how lucky she is. But she

would rather concentrate on the future, and her next session of the uneven parallel bars in family gym.

Her mom and dad also know how blessed they have been, and hope other parents don't give up if they are ever put in similar situations.

"We feel the grace of God and the miracle of modern medicine is what has given us this blessing, times four," said Richard, referring to their children Grant, 15, Amanda, 14, Veronica, 11, and Renee, 8. "With Veronica, we needed a little bit more grace and a little bit larger miracle."

And how has the episode changed them as parents?

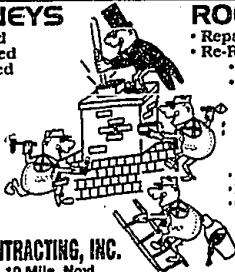
"Just enjoying them for what they can do each day," he said. "Each day you have a child is a gift from God. Don't take that for granted."

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Mothers' group will honor Engler, Keenan

The Michigan Association of American Mothers Inc. will honor 1995 State Mother of the Year Lynn Keenan and 1995 Mother of Young Children Michelle Engler at a luncheon on Saturday, Oct. 28, at the Clarion Hotel in Farmington Hills.

Keenan, the daughter of former Michigan Gov. George Romney and his wife Lenore, is married to attorney Loren G. Keenan and they have eight children and 21 grandchildren.

She received her bachelor's degree from Stanford University, did graduate work in physical therapy, has served on the Michigan Special Olympics Board of Directors for the past five years, has been a PTO president and has been involved with the Red Cross, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts and with women's and children's auxiliaries in her church.

Engler is married to Gov. John Engler and gave birth to triplets last year. She has a bachelor's de-

gree in government, a law degree from the University of Texas, is a member of the Michigan and Texas bar associations, chairs the Michigan Community Service Commission, is spokesperson for the Children's Trust Fund and is on the board of directors of the Library of Michigan Foundation and Michigan Cities in Public Schools.

AMI is a national organization working to honor mothers and strengthening the moral and spir-

itual foundations of the family and home. Members promote motherhood as a viable career and help reduce illiteracy, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, crime, pornography and other threats to family life.

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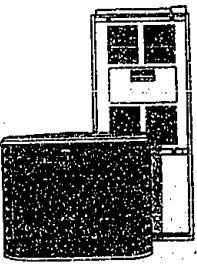
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