

New arrival

Oakland County welcomes its first newborn of the year

BY JENNIFER PLACINTO
STAFF WRITER
jplacinto@oecomm.com

With boxes and items scattered about their condominium, it's apparent Lisa Ring and Kevin Taylor weren't quite ready for their baby, who arrived five weeks early and became the first baby born in Oakland County in 1999.

"He caught us off guard," Taylor said.

As a winter snowstorm blanketed the area last weekend, Jacob Zachary Ring rested comfortably in his hospital room, blissfully unaware of the cold climate. The newborn made his debut at 1:37 a.m. Jan. 1 at Huron Valley-Sinai Hospital in Commerce Township.

He was the first baby born in Oakland County, according to

hospital officials. A check with area hospitals confirmed the earliest arrival.

"I didn't even really realize he was the first," Ring said. That is, until nursing staff members came into her room and said "there's our first baby of the year," she added.

"The nursing staff is wonderful," Ring said. "It makes you just want to stay and have them take care of you."

Jacob weighed in at 5 pounds 6 ounces, and for a premature baby his health is excellent, his West Bloomfield Township parents said. Delivered by Cesarean section on Friday, the newborn and his mother left the hospital Monday, Jan. 4. But the delay had nothing to do with the baby's health. It was needed for the mother to recover.

"Everything checked out just

fine," Taylor said. "He just was a little small and a little purple."

The tiny brown-haired, blue-eyed infant, who swims in the smallest clothing and diapers his parents could find, was welcomed into the world as the 10th grandchild on both sides by his two grandmothers, Beverly Taylor and Dorothy Ring.

But his early fame didn't bring in the crowds.

"We didn't have too many visi-

tors because of the snowstorm," Ring said.

His parents were getting prepared for the New Year's Eve 4-mile run on Belle Isle followed by a celebration with friends when Jacob decided he wanted to be a part of the action.

Ring, a legal secretary at Kupulin, Ormond & Magy in Southfield, left work around noon and headed to her mother's house in Livonia for a New

Year's Eve visit. But, by 2 p.m. she wasn't feeling well and decided against going to Belle Isle.

Taylor, 37, told Ring to check with her doctor and left for the run.

"I was not concerned," Taylor said. "I didn't think she was in early labor."

Ring said she, too, thought it was too early for labor.

Taylor, an attorney with Nitzkin & Associates in Southfield, was still planning on picking up Ring for an early dinner out when he arrived at her mother's home at 6:25 p.m.

But she had other plans and Taylor was just in time to take her to the hospital. Ring, 35, had as a scheduled arrival by 6:30 p.m. Her mother and brother wanted to take her to the hos-

pital as soon as she got off the phone with her doctor, who advised she leave as soon as possible.

They made it to the hospital by 7 p.m. but not before being delayed by a stalled van and three deer who decided to cross the road in front of them in Wixom.

The birthing rooms were packed when they arrived. And like the couples before them, Jacob's parents were hoping for a 1998 arrival for tax write-off purposes.

"I was watching the clock," Taylor said. "We were the last to deliver. All the others made it by midnight."

But they were pretty happy with their son's timing.

Web sites drop the ball in storm coverage

Last weekend's massive snowstorm showed just how badly the area needs reliable and relevant Internet Web sites.

At a time when hundreds of metro area meetings, church services, sporting events and schools were forced to shut down because of the weather, most of the high-profile local sites had old news or generic weather stories.

If there ever was a time when the 'Net was needed to communicate the cancellations and current conditions caused by the snow emergency, it was last weekend.

Perhaps the most glaring example involved WDIV Online, the normally excellent Channel 4 Web site that has a pretty sophisticated school closing list and a real time Doppler radar view that allows storms to be tracked on your PC screen. It was, however, inexplicably offline for most of the weekend.

Didn't any of the supervisors who supposedly manage the Web

site know it was down? If not, the site needs new managers.

If they did notice and didn't call anyone in to fix it, well, that shows what kind of priority the Internet has with WDIV management.

For the record, the station says it was an unusually high number of hits that took the site down. However, their site crashed in November when they tried to put up the very dramatic video of the Hudson's implosion, too. Why didn't they bother to beef up the server if it couldn't handle a lot of hits?

But even if it did crash, restarting it is simple.

It wasn't until late Sunday night after I repeatedly noted their online absence on my PC Talk radio program on WXYT

that the WDIV site struggled back into service.

But WDIV wasn't alone. It was a miserable showing for all of the local Web sites. WWJ Radio had wire story copy on the big snow. WXYZ Radio still had a Christmas poem on its home page. And the Observer & Eccentric! Detroit Free Press and Detroit News sites also mostly recirculating old news.

The lack of really usable storm information underscores one of my pet peeves about online news sites. Because most are run by outfits that publish hard copy newspapers, or broadcast by traditional radio or television, they are invariably given the short end of the stick when it comes to staffing, money and content.

That's because the "old media" bosses who control these "new media" sites are often of their Internet offspring. They view the 'Net as a competitor, a rival for the eyes and ears of those who they'd much rather have reading the paper or watching and view-

ing a broadcast.

How else can last weekend's failure to communicate be explained?

Next time you hear one of those slick promos advertising an "old media" Web site, remember how out of touch those sites were last weekend.

So, what's needed?

For starters, I suggest a new mindset for those who currently run news and information sites. People read newspapers. They watch television. They click through Web sites. User studies show that people come to a Web site to get specific information, not to leisurely peruse the news. Web sites are not read. They are scrolled.

A news and information Web site that is run by people who understand the 'Net will be a site that offers both immediacy and relevancy. That means the site will have round-the-clock staffing, 7-24 connection monitoring and lots of interactive lists and data bases that give people

the information they need — such as church and school closings, neighborhood advisories, news, school lunch menus, high school sports scores and lots of ways to search for very localized information.

The Internet is not a competitor for "old media." It offers customization features they can't even begin to touch. But, I'm afraid, as long as old media types control the purse strings on the news and information sites, all we'll get are sites that tease rather than please.

I also have to be honest about my own site, too. Indeed, as fate would have it, on the very day I started writing this column, my pcimike.com site crashed. My site is hosted on the servers located at BigNet, probably the largest Internet service provider in the area. But it went down Friday night, no one was on duty at BigNet to take my call. So my site stayed down until officials got my frustrated e-mails the next morning.

Re-booting the crashed server was simple. Getting service, though, was not. BigNet officials assure me that won't happen again. They set up an emergency system to handle future problems.

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Mike Wendland reports about computers and the Internet for NBC-television stations coast-to-coast. His radio show is heard every weekend on TalkRadio 1270, WXYT. You can reach Mike through his Web site at www.pcimike.com

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