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Grant Gives Birth Program A Healthy Start

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LAND O' LAKES - Of the 5,237 births in Pasco County in 2006, 35 infant deaths occurred. And 442 were low birth weight babies.

It is the goal of the Healthy Start Coalition of Pasco County to ensure that mothers have the tools to give birth to and raise healthy babies.

"Healthy Start is open to all women in Florida with a referral from their" obstetrician-gynecologists, explained Executive Director John Tschirhart. "We give them information to reduce the possibility of infant mortality and low birth weight babies, plus services such as mental-health counseling, and information about breastfeeding, safety issues, good nutrition and dental health. We provide a lot of resources."

These resources received a major boost recently, through a \$7,500 grant from the Community Foundation of Pasco County; a grant that will fund the Gentle Touch educational curriculum for Healthy Start clients.

At least 100 women stand to benefit from this curriculum, which can be taught at their homes by Pasco Health Department nurses, whose services are funded through Healthy Start.

"The Gentle Touch program uses the 10-step Gentle Touch parenting curriculum to promote safe and stable family environments by enhancing awareness: of child safety including safe sleep anger control; behavior modification; appropriate gentle touching; limit setting; building responsibility and self discipline; building respect; conflict resolution; and creating peaceful relationships at home and in the world," a news release stated.

Gentle Touch teaches families how to take care of their babies," Tschirhart said. "It teaches safety measures and the gentle touch of the baby, and the prevention of conditions such as SIDS sudden infant death syndrome and shaken baby syndrome."

Through books, DVDs, hands-on demonstrations and other visual and educational aids, this free program teaches mothers and families how to raise the safest, healthiest infants possible. As an incentive to complete the program, each family that does so will receive a free crib.

"We're always taking donations of new cribs, to provide this incentive," Tschirhart said. "Some of these families can't afford cribs."

Healthy Start earned the grant, according to Tschirhart, by passing a thorough review process administered by the Community Foundation of Pasco County; an organization that supports programs for the needy.

"We showed them how serving these families provides a service to the community as a whole," Tschirhart said.

The Community Foundation of Pasco County, according to www.cftampabay.org, "was formed in 2002 as a division of the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay by a group of visionary citizens desirous of strengthening the communities in which they live. Since its inception, efforts have focused primarily on educating individuals, organizations and businesses on how they can partner with the foundation to support the charitable needs of Pasco County."

On Thursday, Healthy Start and Community Foundation representatives were on hand at the Land O' Lakes Community Center for a check presentation ceremony.

With the foundation grant in hand, Healthy Start intends to implement the Gentle Touch program as soon as possible, incorporating Gentle Touch as a facet of a larger Fresh Start educational program.

HEALTHY START PASCO

SOME BACKGROUND: The Healthy Start Coalition of Pasco has been awarded a \$7,500 grant through the Community Foundation of Pasco County to fund the "Gentle Touch" program.

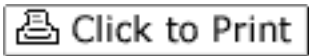
COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS: The Healthy Start Program, the group's Web site says, "provides moms and newborns with the resources, support and help they need to have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy birth."

A LITTLE HISTORY: Based in New Port Richey, Healthy Start has served Pasco communities since 1994.

GET INVOLVED: For information about the Healthy Start Coalition of Pasco, go online to www.healthystartpasco.org or call (727) 841-7888.

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