

Dean Mead attorneys step up to help March of Dimes mission in the community

By Ken Datzman

The March of Dimes is embarking on its most ambitious mission in its 77-year history. The organization has mobilized resources and has formed collaborations with leading universities in a venture that has created five unique Prematurity Research Centers in select parts of the nation.

Finding the fundamental causes and therefore the solutions to the complex problem of premature birth is now the top research priority for the March of Dimes. No one knows what causes premature birth. But the network of cutting-edge centers led by scientists and researchers is looking to make discoveries that will be “game-changers,” just as March of Dimes’ research-funded vaccines were for polio.

The “Campaign to End Premature Birth,” a new March of Dimes initiative, has become more urgent than ever. It brings together health-care providers, researchers, hospitals, insurers, public health officials, public policy experts, and others to identify interventions for mothers and babies, in order to bring about changes in behavior and practice that will result in fewer premature births.

Preterm birth is the number-one killer of newborns in America. More than 450,000 babies are born too soon each year in the U.S. and the national preterm birth rate is worse than many other high-resource countries, the March of Dimes says.

Babies who survive an early birth face serious and lifelong health problems, including breathing problems, jaundice, vision loss, cerebral palsy, and intellectual delays.

Every year in Brevard County, on average, more than 4,897 babies are born, of which 624 are born prematurely. Of that number, 150 are born with birth defects and 35 babies die before their first birthday, according to the March of Dimes research.

The average medical cost for a healthy, full-term baby from birth through the first year is \$4,389, compared to \$54,194 for a baby born prematurely or at low birth weight.

On the upside, the U.S. preterm birth rate since peaking in 2006 has dropped to a 10-year low, meaning 231,000 fewer babies have been born prematurely since 2006, saving the nation’s health-care system nearly \$12 billion in expenses and societal costs, according to the March of Dimes’ 2014 annual report.

“The research that’s being done on a national level by the March of Dimes is saving local communities millions of dollars because it’s helping to keep babies out of neonatal intensive care units,” said Michelle Naberhaus, an attorney with Dean Mead in Viera who is an active volunteer in the community with various charitable organizations, including the March of Dimes. “The work that March of Dimes is



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Rob and Michelle Naberhaus, longtime area community volunteers and practicing attorneys at Dean Mead in Viera, are the event chairs for the seventh annual March of Dimes ‘Signature Chefs Auction’ set for Oct. 6 at the Hilton Melbourne Rialto Place. They have five children and embrace the March of Dimes’ mission in the community. Individual tickets for the fund-raiser are \$200. Event sponsorships start at \$2,500.

Please see March of Dimes, page 19

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March of Dimes

Continued from page 1

doing is crucial — it's impacting families and local communities. It really does make a difference."

With the flu season approaching, the March of Dimes and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that everyone six months of age or older, including pregnant women, be vaccinated annually against the influenza virus. Women who become sick with the flu early in their pregnancy are twice as likely to have a baby with a serious birth defect of the brain, spine, or heart than women who don't catch the virus.

It's unclear whether it's the high fever associated with the flu, or the flu itself that contributes to the increased risk of birth defects, experts say. But despite the potential benefits, only half of pregnant women in the U.S. get a flu shot each season, leaving thousands of moms-to-be and their babies at increased risk of serious illness, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Michelle and her husband, Robert "Rob" Naberhaus III, who is also a practicing attorney at Dean Mead's Viera office, have teamed up to be the event chairs for the seventh annual March of Dimes "Signature Chefs Auction" fund-raiser. The event begins at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 6, at the Hilton Melbourne Rialto Place. For people who enjoy fine dining, wine, auctions, and socializing, the Signature Chefs Auction pays tribute to local chefs while raising funds for March of Dimes.

At the event, the local March of Dimes' "Ambassador Family," Patrick and Aran Hissam, will make a presentation and talk about their daughter Brianna Marie.

Gregory Stephens, division director for Space Coast March of Dimes, said his organization's committee selected "Rob and Michelle because their family is the epitome of what the March of Dimes strives for, healthy deliveries and healthy babies."

"When Gregory first asked us about our interest in being the event chairs for the Signature Chefs Auction, there was some hesitation on our part because we have five healthy kids. We are fortunate," said Rob Naberhaus.

He added, "My cousin's wife, though, had a premature baby and that brings on weeks of angst, whether or not the baby is going to be healthy, whether or not the baby is going to live. Obviously, this is a very broad and complex issue, and the March of Dimes is taking the lead addressing it. We're really proud to be part of the local event that will raise money to benefit research and other areas that affect mothers and babies."

While Michelle Naberhaus said she did not have the "issues of troubled pregnancies," she did say her first child had to be delivered by an emergency Cesarean-section procedure. Her four other pregnancies "were considered high risk and had to be taken by C-section as well, so I was monitored closely. I never really thought about some of the horrific issues you can have during pregnancy and after pregnancy."

She continued, "After speaking to Gregory and getting to know more about the organization, it became very clear that our family has benefitted from March of Dimes research — all the tests that are done during pregnancy, all the screening that's done on babies after birth. This is the result of research performed by March of Dimes."

Rob and Michelle Naberhaus met in college. "We met in

law school, at UF," he said. They both earned their bachelor's degree at UF, too. Rob studied business administration and Michelle political science.

Rob Naberhaus is a shareholder in the Viera office of Dean Mead. He's certified by the Florida Bar as an expert in the areas of wills, trusts, and estates, and has extensive experience working with high net-worth individuals.

As a community volunteer, he's a board member of Junior Achievement of the Space Coast and the Community Foundation for Brevard, among other organizations. Rob Naberhaus also provides pro-bono services to charitable entities. He was recognized as a "Rising Star" by "Florida Super Lawyers" in 2009.

Michelle Naberhaus joined the firm this year. She has more than 15 years experience in the areas of probate litigation, trust litigation, and guardianship litigation. She represents individuals and fiduciaries in estate-related litigation and complex guardianship proceedings throughout the state.

She serves on the board of directors for multiple organizations, including The Haven for Children, Brevard Cultural Alliance, and Florida Tech's Women's Business Center. Michelle Naberhaus was recognized with LEAD Brevard's "4-Under-40" award in 2011.

Individual tickets for the Signature Chefs Auction are \$200. Event sponsorship tables range from \$2,500 to \$15,000. The program is seeking a "presenting" sponsor at \$15,000, as well as sponsorships at other giving levels. To purchase tickets and learn more about the benefits of sponsorship, visit SignatureChefs.org/Melbourne.

At presstime, the Signature Chefs Auction sponsors include: Abacus Technology, Injury Treatment Solutions, Space Coast Intelligent Solutions, Dr. Julio and Susan Vallette, Dean Mead, GrayRobinson, Flammio Financial Group, Health First Maternity, Medicomp Inc., Melbourne Terrace Rehabilitation Center, Parrish Medical Center, and Widerman Malek. The media sponsors are Lite Rock 99.3, "Florida Today," and "Brevard Business News."

Stephens said the event raised \$79,000 last year. "Our goal this year is \$92,000, but we want to top the \$100,000 mark." Stephens joined Space Coast March of Dimes two years ago. Before he took charge, the Signature Chefs Auction netted \$10,000. A seasoned nonprofit executive in Brevard, Stephens has had much success over the years working closely with area businesses, bringing people together to work on behalf of bettering their communities.

Some of the area's top chefs will prepare their signature dishes created exclusively for this event, paired with fine wines. The lineup of chefs includes: Brad Francis, Crowne Plaza Melbourne Oceanfront; Head Chef Josh Eslinger, Crush Eleven; Lance Cook, Eau Gallie Yacht Club; Dave Dashi, Amici's Italian Restaurant and Pizzeria; Donald Edge, Hilton Melbourne Rialto; Jeff Kainz, Ocean 302 Bar and Grill; Matt Nugnes, Matt's Casbah; Ron Shourds, D.I.G. Bistro; and Nate St. Dennis, The Fat Snook.

Following the wine-tasting, dessert will be served and then a live auction will be conducted by auctioneer Wayne Ivey, Brevard County sheriff. The program will also include March of Dimes' special "Fund the Mission," where patrons can make a tax-deductible donation during the live auction. The money will help fund local services, such

as a "month of advocacy" in the community.

Through various community programs, the March of Dimes has been able to effect change within families. An example is its "Healthy Babies are Worth the Wait" campaign. In 2014, 117,000 women received prenatal care and other risk-reduction services as part of the March of Dimes' effort to empower more mothers to have healthy, full-term pregnancies and help reduce the incidence of early birth and curb rising health-care costs.

"A premature child costs an employer 12 times as much as a healthy child," said Stephens. "In Brevard County, the cost is about \$32 million a year for employers and families. We are working to reduce those numbers and have been very successful with our 'Healthy Babies are Worth the Wait' education and awareness campaign."

The campaign message tells women, "If your pregnancy is healthy, it's best to stay pregnant for at least 39 weeks." The campaign reached millions of women in 2014, and has been very effective in the local market.

Stephens said "all four labor and delivery hospitals in Brevard County have signed on, and we have reduced the 'elective' deliveries from 80 percent to less than 3 percent. So we are seeing some big changes in the number of premature birth rates in Brevard as a result of the 'Healthy Babies are Worth the Wait' initiative. The next step is finding out what causes prematurity, and scientists are working to do that at March of Dimes' Prematurity Research Centers."

The first March of Dimes Prematurity Research Center opened at Stanford University School of Medicine in 2011. Then, the Ohio Collaborative, a partnership of the leading academic institutions, children's hospitals, and medical centers in Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland, launched in 2013. Last year, centers opened at Washington University in St. Louis and at the University of Pennsylvania.

In June of this year, the University of Chicago, Northwestern University School of Medicine, and Duke University School of Medicine partnered to create the newest Prematurity Research Center. That partnership is now focusing its efforts on identifying the regulatory genes responsible for ensuring that a pregnancy continues to full-term and how stress can influence those genes.

The five centers form an interactive hub of research to share findings as they work together to determine the causes of preterm birth. The centers are funded by donations from individuals and corporations, including the March of Dimes' number-one supporter, Kmart. Over the last three decades, Kmart has raised more than \$125 million to fund March of Dimes research and programs.

Michelle Naberhaus said she has had long conversations with Gregory Stephens about the origin of March of Dimes and how it has evolved over the decades.

"From my point of view, the March of Dimes recognized where the need was and then were able to pull together a group of scientists, physicians, researchers, and others who have made big strides and advancements in the field. Hopefully, the organization will continue down that path of achievement, and the Prematurity Research Centers and the 'Campaign to End Premature Birth' will be as successful as everything else the March of Dimes has done in the past," said Michelle Naberhaus.