



PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Vi Nguyen-Kennedy (vi@blessherheart.org)

A Devastating Loss Put to Action: Couple Advocates Heart Screening for Newborns

Colleyville, Texas, {May 10, 2010} – One of every 115 babies is born with a heart or circulatory defect, according to the March of Dimes. It is the most common of all birth defects and the No. 1 cause of death from defects in the first year of life. Yet, those defects may go unnoticed until a crisis situation uncovers them – and sometimes, it's too late.

In January 2009, Colleyville residents Steve Kennedy and Vi Nguyen-Kennedy said goodbye to their daughter who became one of those statistics, sending the couple on a journey they never expected to travel.

“We were living our dream,” says Vi, a registered nurse. “We had bought a house, and I was pregnant with our first child and the first grandchild on both sides of our family.” Baby Taryn was born on Dec. 11, 2008, and Vi says, “She was beautiful and precious in every way.”

Taryn showed no signs of defects. “I’d read many books while I was pregnant, but nothing prepared me for what happened or for what was to come,” she says.

On Jan. 7, 2009, at 27 days old, Taryn stopped breathing at home, and Vi performed CPR. Taryn was stabilized at a local emergency room, then sent by air ambulance to a Fort Worth children’s hospital, where she passed away two days later. Tests showed Taryn had two heart defects – total anomalous pulmonary venous return and an atrial septal defect.

After enduring such a devastating loss, Vi says she just couldn’t sit back and let other parents go through the same experience. She got her hands on every bit of information she could find with the hopes of increasing awareness of congenital heart defects and advocating for early detection.

“Raising Congenital Heart Defect awareness one pamphlet at a time”
Bless Her Heart Mail: PO Box 191, Colleyville, TX 76034
Email: info@blessherheart.org

Vi and Steve founded a grassroots organization, Bless Her Heart, and Steve created the Web site: www.blessherheart.org. They obtained 501(3)(c) status as a non-profit organization. They developed an informational pamphlet for new parents that the couple and other volunteers hope to distribute through hospitals, physicians or other means. Their dream is to someday sponsor larger community events to get the word out.

At minimum, the organization advocates that newborns be screened with pulse oximeters – noninvasive medical devices that measure the amount of oxygen in blood – before they leave the hospital. ***Steve and Vi will speak at an open forum May 14 before the Advisory Committee on Heritable Disorders in Newborns and Children, which assists the Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.***

“Losing a child is one of life’s greatest tragedies,” Vi says. “I had to do something to make a difference for other families, and they can’t do anything if they don’t know about it.”