

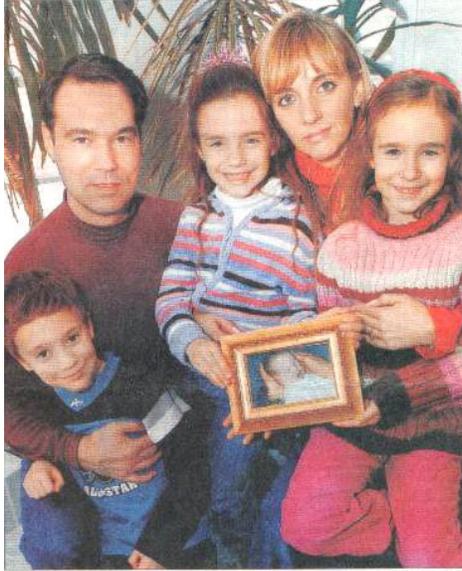
The Eagle-Tribune

Pulitzer Prize winner in 1988 and 2003

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In memory of their daughter



Thomas and Deanna Missert of Windham NH lost their daughter Devon at 5 days of age; they have since worked to see the Devon Nicole's House at Children's Hospital Boston become a reality. Left to right Justin, Thomas, Kaley, Deanna, and Brittany hold a photo of Devon in their home.

Helping others through the pain

Newborn's death lead to charity in her name

By Andrea Bushee

Staff writer

WINDHAM, N.H. -- When Tom and Deanna Missert lost their daughter, Devon Nicole, only five days after she was born, they were devastated.

But they have turned that devastation into a way of helping other parents who are experiencing the trauma they lived through.

The Windham couple lost the baby in July 1999 after a complicated birth in which Deanna Missert's uterus burst. The baby went into fetal distress and her heartbeat was lost during the delivery, but Parkland Medical Center doctors in Derry were able to revive the newborn and stabilize her and her mother in order to transfer them to Children's Hospital at Dartmouth in Hanover.

It was there the couple was told Devon Nicole had no upper-brain activity from the loss of oxygen she endured during her birth and that she would not live much longer.

The two agonized over their loss for many months before they decided they needed to do something in Devon Nicole's name to help other children and their families.

That is how the Devon Nicole House at Children's Hospital Boston became a reality. With the help of many people who donated to their cause, last June they opened the nonprofit charity on the fifth floor of a building at 21 Autumn Street in Boston. They call it a "home-away-from-home" for families with children admitted to the hospital.

"We feel great that it's open," Tom Missert said. "It was a major accomplishment for us."

The home is similar to David's House in Hanover, where relatives of the Misserts stayed during Devon Nicole's last days in the hospital.

Within the first five months of its opening, 129 families stayed in the Devon Nicole House for \$15 to \$50 or less, depending on their income level. No families are turned away because of their income,

Tom Missert said, no matter how high or low it may be. However the rooms are made available to those who are most in need first.

The Misserts have received positive feedback from the people who have stayed in the house and from hospital staff who now have an opportunity to direct their patients' families to a place they can stay for less than the \$200 to \$300 per night an average hotel room costs in the area, Missert said.

"They can't say thank you enough for the house," Missert said.

One of the families now staying in the house has been there for 21/2 months while their child has been in the hospital, he said. They live outside of the country and would not be able to afford to stay anywhere else for such a long time, he said.

"Without the house, where would they go?" he asked. "It's not something a family plans for."

Nobody expects a child to become sick and in need of such extensive medical treatment, he added.

The 13-room house has had a waiting list for the majority of the time it has been open, Missert said, and the challenge the couple face is supporting the charity as well as the grant program their organization has recently started to offer to families in financial need.

The program offers \$250, \$500 and \$1,000 grants to families to help them financially while their children are sick. Many parents are unable to work with a child in the hospital, he said.

The couple have been organizing an annual Valentine's Day dinner fund-raiser for the past four years. It is one of their largest fund-raisers, and they hope to raise between \$20,000 and \$50,000 this year.

A Valentine's dinner was chosen as a fund-raiser since the couple donated Devon's heart valves after she died, saving the lives of a baby boy and girl born with congenital heart defects. Valentine's Day is National Congenital Heart Diseases Awareness Day.

This year's dinner will be held Feb. 12, from 5:30 to 11:30 p.m. The event will be held at the Andover Country Club in Andover, Mass., and will include an ice sculpture, a shrimp and oyster bar, dancing and entertainment, a silent auction for items including resort and spa packages, a flat panel television, Red Sox tickets and Canobie Lake Park tickets.

The dinners offered will be baked stuffed shrimp or beef tenderloin, and appetizers and dessert are included.

The Misserts are hoping between 200 and 300 people will attend the event, and they have 120 tickets left. Tickets are \$75 per person.

For reservations or more information call (603) 594-1385 or log on to www.devonshouse.org to download a ticket request form.