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PHOTOS BY SARAH BUEHRLE

At an annual Christmas gathering, Madeleine Gordon sits among the 13 children she helped bring into the world through donations her foundation gives to couples facing infertility.

## Struggle brings hope to others

### Woman gives gift of life through foundation

By Sarah Buehrle

*Pulse-Journal reporter*

One woman's 15-year struggle with infertility ended by giving dozens of others hope and in 13 cases, something for which to be very thankful.

Madeleine Gordon tried to conceive a child for 15 years, trying various and expensive infertility treatments. But at age 50, realizing she would not become a mother, Gordon, who works in Mason, asked her friends to donate money to a foundation to aid others on their journey to parenthood. Created in 1995, the

Gordon Gift of Life Foundation has helped bring 13 children into the world and continues to help five couples a year defray the costs of in vitro fertilization, a process that averages \$6,000-8,000 for one session.

"I couldn't imagine what it would be like to be a woman and not be able to have a child and then not try to have the child because the funds weren't there," Gordon said at an annual holiday party she holds for the children born through her foundation. "That would be more than painful, that would be intolerable. I thought that's it, I'm going to help."

Gordon's foundation raises money from donations and provides, through the Center for Reproductive Health in West Chester and Cincinnati, more than



On Nov. 13, Katelyn Annaliese Nigro was born to Cindy and Joe Nigro who tried for four years to conceive. Her birth was made possible in part through donations from the Gordon Gift of Life Foundation.

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# Life

## Struggle brings hope to others

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\$10,000 annually to couples trying to conceive. To be a recipient, would-be mothers write a letter explaining their experiences of infertility and motivation for being a parent. Couples need to prove financial need, cannot have another child together and should not have had previous in vitro fertilization, IVF, treatments. The foundation receives approximately 100 letters per year, which the physicians at the Center for Reproductive Health judge.

Gordon's foundation provides five couples a year one-third the cost of the in vitro fertilization, \$6,300 at the Center for Reproductive Health, and must pay one third themselves. The rest is absorbed by the UC Physicians, Center for Reproductive Health and Health Alliance. A couple that would normally have to pay \$6,300 per treatment only pays \$2,100 per treatment for two cycles.

"Children are such a blessing when they're easy to come by. For couples like those here, it's an extra blessing," Tina Mulhollen, a Loveland resident and the first Gordon Gift of Life recipient said at Gordon's holiday gathering. "You beg and you pray and you do anything you can. I've known couples who've mortgaged their homes, sold their wedding rings [to pay for treatments]."

Mulhollen, who found out two weeks before Christmas 1996 that she was pregnant with Katie, had been trying for three years to have a child; she had taken oral medication and undergone six rounds of artificial insemination before giving up. Then her mother found an article about Gordon's foundation.

"How can you describe something that wonderful," said Mulhollen. "They bring children into this world. It's a gift from God. If he hadn't brought us to Madeleine, we wouldn't have Katie."

Mulhollen's story is not unique. Infertility affects more than 6.1 million Americans, 10 percent still of reproductive age, according to the American Society Reproductive Medicine. First successful in 1981, 45,000 babies

have been born through IVF, in which sperm and eggs are mixed in a lab and then reintroduced to the womb as an embryo. The Center for Reproductive Health sees approximately 300 patients a month, according to Dr. Michael A. Thomas, center director who is himself on paternity leave.

Dr. Daniel B. Williams, associate professor and director of the IVF program at the Center for Reproductive Health said 40 percent of the time the male is the cause of infertility and 40 percent of the time the woman is having the problem conceiving. The rest of the time cause is undetermined.

Before coming to Cincinnati in July, Williams was associate professor and director at Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, for 11 years.

"It's something you can correct or help," Williams said of infertility. "It gives you a lot of satisfaction. Over the years you realize having a child is something that is extremely important to many couples and the inability to achieve that in some cases can be devastating."

Jami Couzins has been trying to have a baby for five years with her husband, who has a son from a previous marriage. She underwent one treatment with help from Gordon's foundation in April and is taking shots daily for her second try at IVF. She said the foundation provided her with what is her last chance to conceive. She should know at Christmas if it was successful.

"I feel like I have to try every option I can. I want to feel what it's like, to feel it kick," said Couzins, a 30 year old sixth grade teacher in Madeira. "I knew I wanted to be a mom when I was a little girl. It's hard to put into words."

The Gordon Gift of Life Foundation is now in the process of selecting candidates for 2002-2003. According to Cindy and Joe Nigro, the latest to become parents through the Gordon foundation, the process of IVF is worth the effort: Their daughter Katelyn Annaliese was born Nov. 13, 2002 after the couple spent four years trying to conceive.

"We're still shocked," Cindy said. "She's perfect. It's just a blessing."

Visit [www.gordongiftoflife.com/](http://www.gordongiftoflife.com/) for more information or write to Gordon Gift of Life Foundation P.O. Box 6945 Cincinnati, OH 45206 to learn more or make a tax deductible donation.