

QUAD WATCH



Repository / Scott Heckel

■ **WAITING.** It's seven months and counting in the Rev. Cheryl Clifford's pregnancy. She and her husband, the Rev. Steven Clifford, are expecting their first children, quadruplets.

First-time parents-to-be beat long odds

By DIANA ROSSETTI
Repository Living Section writer

The Revs. Steven and Cheryl Clifford have a new illustration of the power of prayer. Last year, they had no children. Very soon, they'll have four.

It all began on the drive home to visit Cheryl's family in Connecticut several years ago.

"We'd been married a little over a year and we were talking about all sorts of things. I'm from a large family, the oldest of five, and we decided, gosh, maybe we'll try that," said Cheryl, 48. Steven, who operates a tax consulting service for ministers, is 42. "That's when we began to run into problems," she said.

There were seemingly endless infertility tests and a referral to the infertility clinic at Akron City Hospital. The physician there suggested in vitro fertilization, a process in which eggs are fertilized outside the body, then implanted in the woman.

But the Cliffords needed an egg donor. "The doctor had said a woman between 25 and 30 years old would be best. I have a sister in that age range. She's single and she was very excited. She just decided that this would be a wonderful way to help out a sister," said Cheryl.

With doctors here and in Connecticut, where her sister lives, coordinating the women's cycles, the process began. When the time arrived for retrieval of Cheryl's sister's

eggs, she had to fly here within a 24-hour time frame.

The implantation took place March 17. "It's a two-minute process to put the eggs in," recalled Cheryl, "and then you have to lay still for five hours. Then you go home and lay still for five days."

"Because I'm over 40, there was only a 10 percent chance that each one would take," she said. "They implanted four, which gives a 40 percent success rate. The chances of all four taking was 1.7 percent. Talk about beating the odds."

Ultrasound testing has indicated she is carrying two boys and two girls. She is 31 weeks into the pregnancy, a milestone that has surprised her doctors.

"They started out saying if I could carry them for 28 weeks, it would be great. He'd (her specialist) like to go to 34 weeks, but they're thrilled now. Most women are hospitalized by now, many of them before this," Cheryl explained.

Taking in enough calories to fuel the pregnancy is a constant challenge. She has been confined to a foldout sofa in the living room of the couple's Jackson Township home for 79 days. She must eat every two hours around the clock.

Volunteers from the church Cheryl serves as Christian education director, First United Church of Christ, have carried in meals for 2½ months.

"We've had some of the most delicious meals. They've been super supportive. We've talked about forming a new committee at

church when I come back. The Quad Squad. I know I won't be able to get them all in the door by myself," she said.

The Canton Mothers of Twins Club also has joined the effort, she added. Volunteers come in three-hour shifts to provide moral support and the companionship dictated by her physician.

To track premature labor in her high-risk pregnancy, Cheryl uses a home monitoring system twice a day.

"I've gotten to the point where I'm pretty uncomfortable, but with the people staying with me, my spirits are much better. This is doable," she said.

Rallying to the adventure in parenthood is Cheryl's 75-year-old mother, Gertrude Kuchta. She sold her Connecticut home and moved in with the Cliffords last weekend.

"We'd been inviting her for four or five years to live with us, but this tipped it. Four grandchildren to be around. How could she miss that?" she said.

The weeks of forced bed rest have given the mother-to-be plenty of time to read parenting manuals.

"A lot of people have a lot of ideas and suggestions. We'll try them all and find one that works for us," she said. "The diaper question, we haven't answered yet. We figure it's somewhere in the vicinity of 10 per child per day. That's 40 diapers a day, maybe 300 a week. Steve calculated some awful figure of how many we'll have changed by the time they're 2½."