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'FEARSOME FOURSOME'

Local quads turn 1 ... and keep parents on the run

By PEG DOTTAVIO
Living & Society Editor

When you ask Cheryl and Steve Clifford what their past year has been like, they just grin.

With quadruplets, who will be celebrating their first birthdays Friday, it obviously has been a challenge.

Take awesome, sleepless, inspiring and humbling and multiply it by four for a peek inside the Clifford home. To balance it, though, "You get four times as much love and laughter," the couple said.

Feeding, diapering and caring for four babies is exhausting, Cheryl said while stirring a big pot of squash she was cooking for the kids.

"I'm no supermom. It takes four hands. There are always at least two of us," she said, nodding to her mom, Gertrude Kuchta, who moved in to help before the babies were born.

It takes organization, discipline and an army of volunteers — about 60 in all — who come in.

"I'm convinced God has wired women to cope with babies in the middle of the night," Steve said, remembering his turns on that shift. Fortunately, he said, the nightly interruptions with the kids have been minimal.

The quads now eat mostly table foods and still enjoy their bottles. But they refuse to hold the bottles, Cheryl said, so feeding takes time.

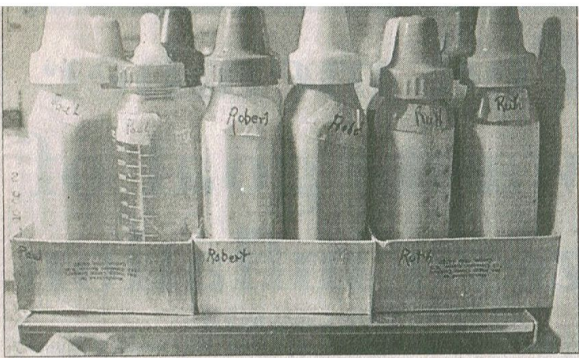
The four babies were delivered Oct. 11, 1995, by Caesarean section — eight weeks premature — in Akron City Hospital. All are in good health and extremely active.

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MARK ROGERS/The Inde

Steve and Cheryl Clifford with babies, from left, Paul, Robert, Heidi and Ruth



Inside the Cliffords' fridge ... filled with bottles

MARK ROGERS/Inde

Quads

Their personalities are evolving, Cheryl said.

She called Ruth a spitfire. "She's energetic, bright and quick. She's always first at everything and has to have her own way," Cheryl said.

"Robert is laid back. He's a loner; very shy and a mama's boy. It takes him longer to start something, but he masters it quick."

She calls Paul her "party animal" because he likes to stay up late. And he's always smiling. "He needs the most touching. His arms are always stretched upward — he likes to be held," she said.

Heidi has the prettiest smile of the four, she said, but don't be fooled. "She's the aggressor," Mom says. "She has the loudest voice. When she wants something she just roars to get it. She pushes the others down and crawls right over them. Tell her no, she sits back and gives you this look, 'Did I do something wrong? I'm just having fun here.'"

Heidi, who weighs the most, has dark hair and dark eyes. Robert has a long, thin face and the other two have round faces. Since they aren't identical, Cheryl doesn't try to dress them alike.

To track intake and patterns, Cheryl keeps a log book sectioned off for each child in the order they came home from the hospital.

Everything is recorded, including what, when and how much each of them ate and drank, who fed them, etc.

They also record their motor skills. Ruth, the oldest, was the one to take the first step.

Some day, when there is time, Cheryl plans to transfer some of this information into individual books for the children to keep.

Donations of clothing and other needs for the children have helped keep costs down. But the formula runs about \$12 a day and the disposable diapers get expensive, Cheryl said.

The Jackson Township couple, both ministers, operate



Four hands not enough for feeding time at the Cliffords

MARK ROGERS/Inde

Clifford & Associates, a tax business in Canton that serves churches and clergy from varying denominations.

Cheryl juggles her role as mom and homemaker with a part-time job as Christian education director at First United Church of Christ in Canton.

"The babies definitely give you pause for your role as a parent," Cheryl and Steve agreed. They savor any free time.

The quads are the center of attention wherever they go, and they love it, Cheryl said.

The Cliffords will host a birthday open house Oct. 12 to show their appreciation to volunteers.

It's been a demanding year, but family, friends, neighbors and even strangers have pitched in.

"People have been wonderful," Cheryl said.