

Local woman gives gift of life — 4 times

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NEW HARTFORD — A New Hartford woman Wednesday became both biological mother and aunt to a set of quadruplets born to her sister in Ohio.

Heidi Kuchta, 28, donated four eggs to her older sister, Cheryl Kuchta Clifford of North Canton, Ohio. Miraculously, the procedure was successful, and Cheryl Clifford gave birth to four babies — two girls and two boys — Wednesday afternoon.

"I was dumbfounded yesterday at work," Kuchta said Thursday. "I got the call and I was very nervous and excited."

Kuchta had expected to be at the hospital for the birth. Originally, doctors hoped to perform a Caesarean section on Clifford Oct. 25. But she became ill, and they decided to deliver the babies early, Kuchta said. Now, she hopes to travel to Ohio this weekend or early next week to be introduced to the new family members.

Cheryl Clifford and her husband, Steven, tried to have a child, but were unsuccessful. Doctors believed Cheryl Clifford's age — 48 — may have hindered conception. But they tried one final longshot — asking Kuchta to

donate her eggs.

Kuchta readily agreed.

"I didn't really have any second thoughts because it was my sister," she said. "We're a close-knit family and it was something I could do for her."

Kuchta does not have children, and because of medical problems said it is possible she may not be able to carry a child, so she was happy to help her sister.

"I always have loved children," she said.

To become a donor, Kuchta received hormonal injections in Connecticut so she and her sister would have compatible ovulation cycles. When that was achieved, she flew out to Akron, Ohio, in March and her eggs were surgically removed and transplanted into her sister, Cheryl Clifford.

Doctors believe because they are sisters, the procedure may have been more successful than if a stranger had been involved, Kuchta said.

At 2 p.m. Thursday, Ruth Marie was born. She was quickly followed by Paul, Heidi Lynn and then Robert Steven at 2:30 p.m. The babies were about eight weeks early.

The babies were tiny: Ruth was

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Quadruplets born in Ohio

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2 pounds, 13 ounces, Heidi weighed 3 pounds, 6 ounces, and Robert, 3 pounds, one ounce. Paul, the largest of the foursome, weighed 3 pounds 10 ounces. He is currently in critical condition at a different hospital than the others, Kuchta said.

The other babies were on oxygen, but have been removed from it. They are doing fine, Kuchta said, and they are all in the hospital with their mother.

"It was a nerve-wracking seven months," Kuchta said.

Donna Benedict of Torrington, Kuchta's best friend, said she could not stop crying after hearing the good news.

"I told her, 'You know Heidi, there's one gift in this world that

you could give somebody that is the ultimate gift and that is giving somebody life. And you gave her four.'"

Kuchta's mother moved out to Ohio last weekend to help with the newborns. Both Cliffords are ministers, so they have a good support network that will help them care for the babies, Kuchta said.

Kuchta is eager to see the babies. Her sister was bedridden since July, so last weekend, when she helped move her mother out there, she assisted with preparations for the babies.

Kuchta helped set up cribs, traditionally one of the things mothers- and fathers-to-be do.

"I will be a very close aunt to them," she said.

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