

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF JACKSON ROCKS AS YEARS ROLL

For more information contact Jen Hospodor at (601) 984-1105 or jhospodor@pubaffairs.umsmed.edu. Photo attached.

JACKSON, Miss. – The Junior League of Jackson has spent the last 30 years giving time out of their days to the University of Mississippi Medical Center's smallest patients.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the League's longest-running project, Rockin' Mamas – women who volunteer in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at the Winfred L. Wisner Hospital for Women and Infants. The League planned to celebrate the project's anniversary Sept. 12 at the NICU reunion, but swine flu concerns forced cancellation of the event.

Despite some minor changes over the years, the major premise of the Rockin' Mamas has remained the same: At least one and sometimes two volunteers spend two hours every day of the week in the NICU providing "loving, non-medical support" through tactile, verbal and visual stimulation.

"These women see things in such a nurturing way," said Diane Dukes, a neonatal nurse practitioner and instructor in pediatrics who has worked with Rockin' Mamas for almost 25 years. "Our staff is very compassionate, but they also have to focus on healing the patients. These ladies come here with one goal in mind and that is to show compassion to the babies."

Participants in the project undergo standard volunteer orientation at the Medical Center and further specialized training in the NICU. Because they work with babies whose families cannot be with them during their long hospital stay, social workers and volunteer coordinators approach families about participating in the project.

Generally, the infants are near the age when they should be interacting with their families daily and all must be clinically stable. League members keep a log with each child's name, crib number and a description of the child's interaction with any League members to ensure all infants receive equal attention.

Each spring, League members choose their preferred 50-hour volunteer projects for the upcoming year. Although there are up to 15 different opportunities each year, Karen Falgout, Junior League of Jackson health project area chair, said Rockin' Mamas is always a sought-after project.

"We place our most seasoned League members there, as tenure in the League is a primary consideration," Falgout said.

Rockin' Mamas began in 1979 when the League donated a \$45,000 specialized ambulance – dubbed the "neonatal cradle" – to the City of Jackson. The ambulance was dedicated to transporting premature and high-risk newborns from all over the state to Jackson-area hospitals, including the Medical Center, for specialized care. Following the donation, League members began the Rockin' Mamas Program to help foster maternal-infant bonding that may be interrupted because families cannot be with the babies. Research has shown that the type of interaction provided by Rockin' Mamas can have a positive effect on an infant's neurological development.

"You hate to think of a baby struggling," said Trisha Richardson, a former chair of the Rockin' Mamas project. "It is such a joy to be able to help out that mom who can't be there for whatever reason."

In addition to Rockin' Mamas, the League makes significant contributions to other Medical Center projects. In 1991, its members raised the \$2 million needed to help build the Mississippi Children's Cancer Clinic, the foundation of the Blair E. Batson Hospital for Children. They host a bi-annual NICU reunion for "graduates" and their families. League volunteers in the Project REACH Program spend time with patients in the Children's Cancer Clinic and visit the activity rooms in Batson Hospital.

Cutline:

Julie Crump of Brandon, Junior League of Jackson volunteer

9-15-09

Please forward this message to colleagues who might be interested. If you wish to be removed from this list or know of a colleague to add, send an e-mail message to: LAGriffin@pubaffairs.umsmc.edu.

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