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S. Elgin woman helps others become parents

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To protect the privacy of those involved in the egg- donation process, only the donor's first name was used for this story. Hanging out with her two children at a playground on sunny spring mornings is just one reason she enjoys being a mom. So a South Elgin woman did what she could to help two other couples experience parenthood.

Kelly, a 28-year-old teacher, became an egg donor.



Kelly also was inspired by what a friend back home in Southern California went through trying to have a baby.

"Her and her husband had fertility issues, and I heard about their failures and then their success," said Kelly. "I found what they did nothing short of awe-inspiring."

The couple used in vitro fertilization and has a healthy son who soon will be 3 years old.

A year ago, Kelly did her research on becoming an egg donor.

Liking what she found on its Web site, she contacted The Center for Egg Options in Northbrook.

"After talking with them by phone, I had my light bulb moment that I wanted to do this," Kelly said.

The process included filling out a preliminary online screening form. Making it past that, Kelly completed a more extensive online document and provided information about her background, career, life, pictures of herself at various ages and photos of her own children. Next was a genetic screening via questionnaire, a pap smear and psychological counseling.

"Donors must be 21 to 29 years old, healthy, living a healthy lifestyle and be emotionally stable," said CEO founder Nancy Block, who started the business after spending 17 years as an obstetrician, gynecologist and infertility nurse in Chicago. "They also must be willing to commit themselves to the process."

Once matched, Kelly, the couple and their attorneys met to sign a formal agreement, which covered what is done with unused eggs and allowances for seeing a child. In her case, Kelly said the couple kept frozen embryo should they decide to have another child, and they can contact her should they choose to let her see the child.

Block said there are efforts under way to create a national registry of egg and sperm donors. Currently, it is each agency's responsibility to closely examine donors and ensure the health, safety and privacy of all parties, she said.

While the U.S. Food and Drug Administration requires donor records only be stored for 10 years, CEO keeps all records indefinitely. Tracking can provide vital medical resources when children born through donor sperm or eggs need a bone-marrow transplant or organ donation, Block said. Should a disease or sex-linked disorder arise, donor access could provide lifesaving information.

Unused fertilized eggs can be frozen, donated to research or a third party, or thawed (destroyed), though the latter option has been used only once in the nine years she has operated CEO, said Block.

After the agreement was made, Kelly had blood work done and a pelvic ultrasound. The results were good and she went on birth control pills to get her menstrual cycle synchronized with the woman who would be using her egg. Kelly also took injections every few days for nearly a month that put her cycle in sync with the recipient's and stimulated production of follicles to increase her egg production. The process also included frequent doctor's appointments.

Harvesting Kelly's eggs was performed on an outpatient basis under mild sedation. She was paid \$7,000 for the donation, and her medical expenses were covered by the couple, who also sent her a thank-you note, a pendant and gifts for her own children.

"The only way this could be better is if they decide to contact me," said Kelly, who found the process so rewarding she donated eggs to another couple this spring. Though she can give up to four more times, Kelly said this will be her last.

Block said what she finds most pleasant about her business is "getting baby pictures and notes to thank us. It's a huge, huge feeling. We just got some shots of twin boys this morning."