

New cord blood program earns praise

By **ROBIN BROWN**
The News Journal

A new program to bank infants' umbilical cord blood for lifesaving transplants got off to a quick start, officials said Wednesday.

And the Wilmington-area couple behind the program, unveiled Tuesday at Christiana Hospital, got unexpected praise in Washington, D.C.

"The first donation was about an hour after the press conference," said Mary Fenimore of the Brady Kohn Foundation. The nonprofit group developed the program that offers

free donation services to parents of about 7,000 babies born at Christiana Hospital each year.

The program is a collaboration of the foundation, Christiana Care Health System and The Elie Katz Umbilical Cord Blood Program at Community Blood Services in Paramus, N.J. The New Jersey group is covering collection, processing and storage costs that average \$842 per donation. Blood, otherwise disposed of as medical waste, is collected after cords are cut.

The cord blood is rich in stem cells used to treat more than 40 diseases.

Rep. Mike Castle, R-Del., chairman of the Biomedical Research Caucus, praised Carolyn and Andrew Kohn on the floor of the U.S. House.

The Kohns' son died in 2002 at age 2½ of a rare bone marrow disorder, despite a transplant from his cord blood.

Castle – supporting the program since he learned of its pilot project begun two years ago – praised the free, public banking of cord blood as "the first step into truly cutting edge medical research."

He told lawmakers, "Of the cord blood collected, roughly 60 percent will be banked and used

for medical procedures such as bone marrow transplants, while the other 40 percent will be used for research that has the potential to heal countless diseases in the future."

Banked cord blood will be available to doctors worldwide through a data base used to match recipients.

The large volume of babies born at Christiana Hospital and their diversity is expected to broaden the global supply, now estimated to be about 90 percent from white babies.

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FYI

To learn more about donating babies' cords or more about the program, contact the Brady Kohn Foundation at 765-2875, early in the pregnancy, or visit www.thebradykohndelawareonline.com.

ONLINE

Read a previous story and watch a video interview with a donor mother and video of Tuesday's announcement at www.delawareonline.com.