

THE ADVOCATE ACADIANA

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Couple win free in vitro chance

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LAFAYETTE — A Lafayette fertility doctor on Monday awarded a local couple, trying for a baby for half a decade, \$10,000 or more worth of medical help that could give the pair a 50-50 chance of having that baby.

Dr. John Storment, a reproductive endocrinologist with Fertility and Women's Health Center of Louisiana, teamed with Women's and Children's Hospital of Lafayette, Sheridan Healthcare and several pharmaceutical companies to offer one free round of in vitro fertilization — an offer worth \$10,000 to \$15,000, depending on what procedures and medications are needed.

The lucky couple is Laura and Terry Hughes of Lafayette, who had gone through two ectopic pregnancies and didn't have the money for in vitro fertilization.

An ectopic pregnancy is one in which a fertilized egg attaches itself to the fallopian tubes instead of the wall of the uterus, creating a severe danger to the mother. In vitro fertilization avoids this because a doctor harvests the mother's eggs, fertilizes them with the father's sperm and places the fertilized egg into the mother's uterus.

The couple was one of 45 who applied to be considered for the free treatment in the "Gift of Hope 2006" program Storment and his wife first attempted this year.

A selection committee of four people sorted through the applications and gave Storment the name of the winner, and he in turn called Laura Hughes to let her know the good news, in advance of Monday's official announcement.

"I felt like Ed McMahon knocking on the door, because her response was just classic," Storment said of that call.



Advocate staff photo by BRYAN TUCK

Dr. John Storment, right, congratulates Laura and Terry Hughes on Monday morning at Women's and Children's Hospital in Lafayette after the couple was awarded a free cycle of in-vitro fertilization by the hospital. Storment and his wife came up with the program to assist couples who may have trouble with the cost of the procedure.

Laura Hughes, 31, said that while she and Terry knew the in vitro process was their last best shot at having a baby, they also knew they didn't have the money to go that route without years of delays.

"It would have taken three or four years" to save the needed money, she said.

Laura Hughes, a veterinary technician by trade, took the call from Storment while helping her boss with a procedure, and said her reaction gave the veterinarian a shock.

"I'm in the middle of a surgery room crying," she said. "When I heard his voice, I was laughing and crying at the same time."

Laura Hughes continued to use the word "overwhelmed" when asked to describe her feelings Monday, and Terry Hughes seemed unable to wipe the wide smile off his face as his wife took the lead in talking to the media.

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Storment said that, while he can offer no guarantees, the pregnancy rate of people who visit his office for in vitro fertilization is about 50 percent, compared to the general national average of about 38 percent and the 20 percent pregnancy rate for people who go about it the old-fashioned way.

The Hugheses were actually patients of Storment's in the past, when they were trying other fertility methods, the doctor said.

And while he had no say in whom the committee chose, he knew that couple to be a deserving pair, Storment said.

The Gift of Hope presentation was part of a larger event at Women's & Children's Hospital on Monday, as

officials from the hospital also discussed recent and future expansion of the hospital complex's services and structures.

Kathy Bobbs, CEO of the hospital, said two new medical office buildings are on the way for the complex encompassing about 100,000 square feet of new space.

She said one building will be dedicated to pediatrics and the other women's services.

Bobbs said the hospital plans to offer a women's wellness center and women's cancer center and brought on a pediatric orthopedic surgeon.

Patti Monczewski, chief operating officer for Women's & Children's Hospital, said the hospital had also recently opened a sleep disorder center, expanded its nuclear medicine program to five days a week and will soon have a magnetic resonance imaging center at the hospital.

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