

Community

Neighborhood news and events in Fremont

A village supports dad, twins

Wife dies after childbirth; community rallies to provide financial, emotional support

BY WES BOWERS

Bill Eagan became a father for the first time in December when his wife, Laura, gave birth to twin daughters, Anne and Suzanne.

The joy of new life was short-lived, however. Not long after the twins' birth on his 58th birthday, Laura died.

Soon after, a too-small Anne was forced to remain in the hospital for more than a month. Her sister, Suzanne, was able to come home on Christmas Eve.

Hit hard by his wife's passing and the concern he had about how to care for two young children on his own, Eagan was saved by old friends.

"There has been an incredible show of support from the community," Eagan said. "Without it, I'd just be lost. Lots of people have stepped forward and have just done incredible things."

Mission San Jose Rotary Club, a civic organization that Eagan chaired in the past, pledged childcare support and has raised \$8,000 in two months.

Eagan said fellow Rotarian Mike King then started a Web page to garner greater support.

The page has a section where volunteers can sign up to donate their time taking care of the twins.

One person, Sharon Fox, a member of the Mothers of Multiples Club, stepped forward to lend a hand in redecorating the Eagans' three-bedroom townhouse in Newark.

Eagan said Sharon Fox brought her husband Carl to the house, who then remodeled a closet in the home's master bedroom.

"The next thing I know, another lady, Diana Ihde, got a group to paint the entire upstairs of the house and redo the twins' room," he said. "The painting, changing a dishwasher — just the amount of time they've taken has been fantastic."



Bill Eagan keeps daughters Anne (left) and Suzanne comfortable with the assistance of friend Beverly Bridges.

Photo by Scott Hester

Eagan said about 10 other women have volunteered to babysit and take turns with the responsibility.

He said one of the women from Mothers of Multiples was a nanny, and her daughter will most likely take the nanny position Eagan has open.

Eagan even had friend, Beverly Bridges, a Hollywood scriptwriter from Southern California, drop everything, and come up to help.

He said members of 50th anniversary non-profit group Celebrate Fremont such as Irene Koehler, Sue Chan, and Jack and Maria Rogers, have come over on a daily basis with food and clothing.

Piper Tremay, a nurse, said helping Eagan has been wonderful.

Tremay said she goes to his house four days a week from 3 to 6 p.m., and once again on Sundays.

"Just to be able to spend some time with some babies has been great," she said. "It's been remarkable for me because I never had children of my own, and I've gotten to spend so much time with them. I hope to

be around throughout the girls' lives."

Tremay said she learned of Eagan's situation through a note posted on the refrigerator at Washington Hospital Outpatient Center.

She said an anesthesiologist's mother knew Eagan, and asked if anyone at the hospital could help.

"I think that if there are any women out there who just want to hold babies, or cradle or rock them, this would be a great opportunity," she said. "To take a few hours out of your life, for this, is really worth it."

Debbie Gumina is another nurse who said she heard about the Eagans' situation through her husband, a member of the Mission San Jose Rotary Club.

"It's just a tragic situation all around," she said. "I'm a birthing nurse and having four kids myself I just wanted to do anything I could to help out."

Gumina said she tries to go to the Eagans' home twice a week, assisting with basic childcare duties.

"I've been there since they came home,

and I've seen them grow," she said. "I hope I can still be of assistance in any way that I can, whenever they need me."

Eagan, 57, married his wife in June 2004. She was 49 when she died.

Eagan said he had been all over the world and done a lot of things, but had never been a father.

He said his wife wanted to have children for him, to let him experience what it was like to be a dad.

He said while her death shortly after giving birth was a great shock, the amount of community support that emerged over the last two months has also been equally shocking.

"Of course I didn't anticipate anything," he said. "But when (the support) happened, I didn't have expectations. The support was just there."

Eagan said he's grateful to all the groups and individuals who have helped him over the last two months.

"They say it takes a village to raise a baby," Eagan said. "Well, in this case, there is a village raising two babies."