



Judy Fayre, right, a registered nurse and certified lactation consultant, leads a recent session of the Mother & Baby: Newborns 0-3 Months group that meets weekly at Anna Jaques Hospital.

In the Family way

Anna Jaques' Birth Center aims to wrap both parents and babies in comfort

The celebration of Mother's Day falls on May 8 this year, but it might be argued that every day is a mother's day at the Birth Center and Neonatal Care Center at Anna Jaques Hospital in Newburyport.

The center has been updated over the past few years — its first major renovation since the early 1990s — and now offers 12 private rooms. The goal is to treat expectant moms like first-class guests, with nurses and support staff who are well-trained, considerate concierges determined to make the visit as joyful and healthy as possible.

"The nurses are friendly and informative, and there always seems to be a doctor available," says Isabelle Scorgia, a Newburyport mother who

delivered her second boy in February. "It's been a great experience for us because we both feel very comfortable here."

The "us" would include husband Erik Scorgia, who was in the delivery room for the births of both children, 22-month-old Joseph and new addition Julian.

The single rooms enable a partner to stay overnight, and the hospital encourages the dual companionship.

"Because the hospital is in our hometown, I can go back and forth to the house," Erik Scorgia says. "I appreciate the chance to stay overnight, and we have family support nearby, who can help with our firstborn."

Satisfaction with the center has been a goal of Anna Jaques managers in recent years.

As hospitals have become

competitive for patients, medical centers on the North Shore have been embellishing their facilities and offering attentive care.

The Newburyport Five Cents Savings Bank recently committed to a \$250,000 donation to the Birth Center that helped complete a \$1.1 million investment to upgrade all patient rooms.

Enhancements have resulted in new technology, modern decor and furniture for the dozen rooms.

About 60 babies are born there each month, and it's fair to say the rooms receive considerable use.

Growing over the years

Anna Jaques Hospital has emerged into one of the key institutions of this community.

Today, the 123-bed facility is the largest employer in the city, with 700

By DYKE HENDRICKSON • Photos by BRYAN EATON

Erik and Isabelle Scoria of Newburyport recently welcomed newborn Julian, who joins older brother Joseph, 22 months. Both children were delivered at Anna Jaques Hospital.



TAKE A TOUR

Expectant parents or people considering starting a family are invited to take free tours of the Birth Center and Neonatology Care Center at Anna Jaques Hospital.

Tours are held from 7 to 8 p.m. on the first Wednesday of every month. Visitors will receive information on classes and programs on topics including early pregnancy, prepared childbirth, breast-feeding, prenatal exercise, hypnobirthing, prenatal and postpartum massage, and support for new mothers.

To attend a tour, email birthcenter@ajh.org.

full-time and 1,000 full- and part-time employees.

The hospital and its physicians see about 120,000 patients per year, including 33,000 in the emergency room.

But it's taken many years to get there.

The facility was created by a generous benefactor, Anna Jaques, whose vision was a quality health care center for women and men.

Jaques, a lifelong resident, gave bonds worth \$25,000 more than a century ago for a hospital to treat those in Newbury, West Newbury, Amesbury, Salisbury and Newburyport.

"About the year 1880, members of the medical profession in this city and adjoining towns were seriously considering

the need for a centrally located hospital," local historian Ghlee Woodworth recounts in her book "Tiptoe Through the Tombstones." "The days were over for performing an operation at night where the mother of a child held a kerosene lamp over a bed."

Woodworth references a 1947 Daily News article by Edith M. Howe that describes a visit by Howe's father, Dr. Francis Howe, to the Jaques household.

As the doctor was leaving, "He was followed to the door by the housekeeper who told him she thought Miss Jaques was worrying over the disposal of part of property, inherited from her two brothers and a sister," Howe writes.

The doctor reportedly suggested that,

BIRTH CENTER BY THE NUMBERS

- ▶ 12 private rooms
- ▶ 720 deliveries in 2015
- ▶ 24/7 neonatologist available in Neonatal Care Center, a Level 1B nursery
- ▶ 1 hydrotherapy spa tub for labor comfort
- ▶ 85 percent of moms breast-feeding at discharge
- ▶ 3 free Mother & Baby support groups offered weekly, as well as prenatal classes for newborn care, siblings and breast-feeding

"She might give some of it for a hospital, and then he explained to the housekeeper how much the community needed such a facility."

The first patient was admitted in May 1884.

The facility had 13 beds. Though Jaques initially protested, she was eventually persuaded to permit the name of the building to be Anna Jaques Hospital.

In 1888, the Anna Jaques Hospital Aid Association was incorporated with

the sole purpose of raising money for the medical center. In addition to the volunteer group's annual collection, hospital managers continued to seek gifts from private individuals and contributions from churches.

In October 1896, a home for nurses, connected with a training school, was completed. (The nursing school closed in 1937).

By the turn of the century, a large facility was needed.

A location was found, and trustees bought about 10 acres of land on Highland Avenue. This is the current location of today's growing medical center.

It was completed and dedicated in 1904 and cost about \$100,000.

'Personal attention'

Today, the Birth Center appears to be one of the hospital's most appreciated assets.

"We provide care and attention to mothers, not just in the medical area but in personal support," says Hannah Pawlencio, a registered nurse who spent a dozen years at Boston Children's Hospital before coming to Anna Jaques several years ago. "For some mothers, there's a lot to learn.

"We have outpatient support, and we can be reached by phone," she says. "A smaller community hospital can provide much personal attention."

Pawlencio said that the center's Mother & Baby groups have been a popular addition in recent years because moms can meet regularly to ask questions and make friendships with other young mothers.

"It's a safe place, and mothers can get peer-to-peer support and learn that many of them have the same challenges," Pawlencio says.

Isabelle and Julian Scorgia currently take part in the Mother & Baby: Newborns 0-3 Months group that meets every Wednesday afternoon at the hospital.

Many young parents, of course, are knowledgeable about the birthing process. With both mom and dad self-educated on the process, doctors can encounter a full birthing room.

Fathers sometimes are permitted to cut the cord, and even catch the baby.

"It's good that parents know what to expect," says Dr. Rebecca Boyer, who has been delivering at the center for about 10 years. "They feel more empowered, and

Danielle Pelletier, a midwife, checks on Jessie Ballantine of Haverhill and her newborn son, Griffin Carbo.



Matt Zinck and Payton Mastaw of Amesbury dote on their new son, Jordan Zinck, born Feb. 9, in the Neonatal Care Center at Anna Jaques.



we often have good discussions.

"But doctors have to manage expectations, too," she says. "Each delivery is different."

In recent years, the center has enhanced its neonatal center for very small or vulnerable babies.

Among the doctors who provide support is Dr. DeWayne Pursley, chief of neonatology and director of the Klarman Family Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

Anna Jaques has nurtured a relationship

with Beth Israel Deaconess in recent years.

"It says a lot about the hospital that it maintains a neonatal program," says Pursley, who lives in Newburyport and commutes to Boston. "They are really interested in the level of care."

He said that if a premature birth or a unusual condition is potentially serious, the mother and infant can be transported to Beth Israel Deaconess.

If things go well, the infant and mom are returned to Anna Jaques — where they belong. *MG*