



**AMHERST**

# Passion for pediatrics



KELSEY LEYVA — THE MORNING JOURNAL

Carrie Rittenhouse, coordinator of speech therapy at the Mercy Health and Recreation Center in Amherst, pictured far left, and members of her speech therapist team work with children and adult patients at the facility in Amherst as well as the Mercy Regional Medical Center in Lorain. Pictured alongside Rittenhouse, from left to right, are Morgan Catalano, Brittany Parker and Ginger Dittrick.

## Speech therapist coordinator at Mercy fulfills dream

**By Kelsey Leyva**  
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Joining the Mercy family has been a goal of Carrie Rittenhouse, a speech therapist and coordinator of speech therapy at the Mercy Health and Recreation Center in Amherst, since she was a young girl.

Growing up, Rittenhouse volunteered as a candy striper at the former St. Joseph Hospital in Lorain and watched as her mother, Sharon Trotta, served as a registered nurse for Mercy and built relationships with her fellow employees.

"It really inspired me to want to be a part of this kind of family," Rittenhouse said. "It was just like an extended family."

Her aspirations came to fruition after she earned her bachelor's and master's degrees at Central Missouri State University and completing a nine

month clinical fellowship in Athens. Rittenhouse then returned to Lorain County and started working for Mercy, focusing on what she now considers her passion: pediatrics.

"When I was graduating I would have told you that I would only be with adults and that I didn't want to work with pediatrics," she said with a laugh, explaining how her first year with Mercy changed that. "Those kids just pulled you in. They just stole my heart."

A majority of Rittenhouse's 15-year career has been spent with Mercy in the pediatrics capacity, but she has also worked in acute care, ICU and inpatient rehab.

Rittenhouse, of Avon, said she decided to go into speech therapy because she was inspired by both of her parents' professions. Her father, Louis Trotta, worked as a

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Jacob Jurecko, 5, plays in the sandbox during his physical therapy session with Katie Ottinger, a physical therapist assistant, July 21 at the Mercy Health and Recreation Center in Amherst. Jurecko receives physical, speech and occupational therapy through Mercy.

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AMHERST

# Welcome to the world



RICHARD PAYERCHIN — THE MORNING JOURNAL

Certified Nurse Midwife Katie Lamb stands by a historic birth register and other items on display UH Elyria Medical Center's Family Birth Center, on July 21. Five midwives on staff at the Family Birth Center help deliver hundreds of babies a year.

## Midwives bring babies into the world, help moms, dads during pregnancy

By Richard Payerchin  
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**For many, the title midwife still causes surprise when people ask about the job, said Katie Lamb, one of five certified nurse midwives that work with the Family Birth Center.**

Lorain County's nurse midwives serve moms, dads and some of northern Ohio's brand new residents.

The team helps bring new babies into the world at the UH Elyria Medical Center's Family Birth Center, but the midwives also get out in the field – not literally, but at UH's Amherst office at 910 Liberty Bell Drive.

For many, the title midwife still causes surprise when people ask about the job, said Katie Lamb, one of five certified nurse midwives that work with the Family Birth Center.

"They have this shocked look on their face and then they go, 'You deliver in people's homes?'" Lamb said. "I'm like, I've never done a birth in anybody's home, nor do I ever plan to.

"I think they think we're in the cornfields or we're in people's homes," Lamb said with a laugh.

Some 50 years ago, or even 20 years ago, some midwives might have been trained by other midwives without formal education, Lamb said. There still are different classifications of midwives, but the medical system's certified nurse midwives practice in a hospital setting, not in homes, she said.

As a nursing student at the University of Cincinnati, Lamb, 36, said her undergraduate coursework

included a range of diverse topics and issues.

The exposure to labor and delivery was minimal, "but it was that experience that kind of said, yeah, this is where you need to be," Lamb said.

"The one thing that I really remember was a 16-year-old patient who, she needed support and there was just chaos transpiring in the room," she said.

The girl's family appeared unconcerned and the doctor was in a rush, Lamb recalled.

"I felt like me, as the

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# Welcome

FROM PAGE 2

nursing student, was the only thing that this girl had," she said. "Afterward she was so thankful that I was there, and I was just a student."

After graduating from UC, Lamb went to work for two years as a labor and delivery nurse at Ohio State University from 2002 to 2004, gaining experience with patients having high-risk deliveries. She went to Vanderbilt University to earn her master's degree with specialties in nurse midwifery and as a family nurse practitioner.

An Eastlake native, in 2006 Lamb joined UH Elyria Medical Center, where the hospital staff helped deliver 921 babies in 2015. The certified nurse midwives handle about 35 percent of the births — many of them healthy and happy, Lamb said.

The UH office in Amherst draws patients from around Lorain, Erie and Huron counties, with some expecting mothers coming from as far as Wakeman, Norwalk and Sandusky.

The midwives' involvement starts long before the woman goes into labor. They help patients deal with a number of women's health issues.

They prescribe medications, order tests, and follow women for the duration of pregnancy, Lamb said.

"So midwives now essentially are independent providers of medicine," Lamb said.

They also engage fathers, boyfriends, fiances and the mother's parents as part of the process. Their involvement is crucial, Lamb said, and questions are encouraged, especially for first-time parents.

The patients lead their care, backed by the guidance, support and medical science of the hospital, Lamb said.

When dealing with pregnancy, people sometimes expect the worst. That can be based on family experiences or television shows, whether fiction or documentaries, that dramatize high-risk pregnancies and the effects on mothers, fathers and babies.

At UH Elyria Medical Center, physicians consult with women when there are health risks for her or the child. Physicians always are

**"I really love midwifery and I can't picture myself not doing this anymore. I love making cakes for the babies I've delivered. It's one of the neatest things when you get to make the cake for their birthday party."**

— Katie Lamb, midwife

## SOME PARTS OF PREGNANCY STILL A MYSTERY

At UH Elyria Medical Center's Family Birth Center, certified nurse midwife Katie Lamb and her colleagues have years of experience helping expecting moms, dads, and their families bring new babies into the world.

But there are a few things they can't control.

Part of their work schedule for deliveries depends on the babies involved. Is there a time when babies are more likely to arrive?

"The full moon — I am not kidding — the full moon really is no joke," Lamb said. "The full moon is a weird thing."

"Changes in barometric pressure is another weird thing," Lamb said. "People's water tends to break if there's a big storm that comes through, just weird things like that."

Obstetrics in general can have wide fluctuations in numbers of patients, sometimes with many, sometimes with few.

Certain months tend to be busier. Factors include public events that cause people to celebrate or weather or occurrences that keep people confined at home.

"It sounds goofy but, big snowstorms and things ... it kind of goes back to what things we're doing nine months ago," Lamb said. Despite advances in science, the midwives can't predict exactly when labor will start or how long it will last.

"Babies just make their own timeframe, for sure," Lamb said.

Determining how couples can choose to make a girl or a boy still remains a mystery.

"If I knew that I wouldn't have to work, probably, I could be rich," she said.

Lamb also has stopped keeping her own scorecard of babies she delivered.

"I'm getting close to a thousand," she said.

available to attend if a medical problem occurs during delivery, Lamb said.

But many people don't see the "typical" pregnancies and deliveries that the midwives deal with, Lamb said.

"You don't hear the, I totally rocked that labor and I did great," Lamb said. "You hear the, 'Oh, I pushed for five hours.'"

"The huge, vast majority of pregnancies and labors and deliveries are normal," she said. "We have this belief and feeling that pregnancy is a normal thing. It's what women's bodies were intended to do. It's not a sickness, it's not a problem. This is a normal thing."

Lamb said she encourages women and families to share their experiences when things go right.

"It empowers women, too," Lamb said. "I think it's hard when all you hear is bad things. Everybody just assumes that something is going to go wrong. So I'm like, tell people that, tell people you can do this. Be



RICHARD PAYERCHIN — THE MORNING JOURNAL

Certified Nurse Midwife Katie Lamb, right, poses for a photograph with Sharna Siwierka, 31, of Elyria, and her sons, Alexander Spicer, 5, and Zachary Spicer, 1 day, in Siwierka's room at UH Elyria Medical Center's Family Birth Center, on July 21. Zachary Spicer, the son of Siwierka and Tim Spicer, 35, was born the day before and Siwierka joined the hundreds of women who work each year with the midwives of the Family Birth Center.

a support person for them. Say, you're a strong woman, you can manage this."

Away from the delivery room, Lamb and her husband, Devin, are hardcore Cleveland Indians fans who hope to visit every Major League Baseball park.

She also is founder and chief baker of the Katie Lamb Pie Co.

The side venture started when Lamb made eight pies for coworkers. Word spread and now her menu includes specialty cakes and cupcakes.

The pie company has benefited from some exposure to Southern recipes when Lamb studied at Vanderbilt in Nashville. For now, it will remain a home business with the occasional crossover into Lamb's medical job.

"I really love midwifery and I can't picture myself not doing this anymore," Lamb said. "I love making cakes for the babies I've delivered. It's one of the neatest things when you get to make the cake for their birthday party."

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# Passion

FROM PAGE 1

teacher in the Brecksville-Broadview Heights school district for more than 35 years.

“Speech therapy was just that perfect mixture of both where I kind of got my medical and teaching together and I could incorporate both of them,” she said.

For the last four or five years, Rittenhouse has worked as a coordinator for both the recreational center in Amherst as well as the Mercy Regional Medical Center in Lorain.

She divides her time between the two locations. Tuesdays are when she meets with her pediatric patients.

“I just love and adore the kids that I have and I’ve had them for so many years because sometimes speech therapy can take a long time,” she said.

Children with autism and developmental delays are among those that attend speech therapy, Rittenhouse said. Therapy includes learning and practicing vowel sounds and other noises, as well as play-based activities.

“Children learn through play and that’s where my passion lies in that early identification of language disorders and getting the kids back and ready so that they’re on the path by the time they go to kindergarten and first grade,” she said, noting that therapy can start for children as young as two or three.

Reaching out to the community is also important to Rittenhouse and her role as a speech therapist. A monthly newsletter was started this January for pediatrics that is sent out to local physicians’ offices and some of the libraries and touches on some of the topics patients frequently ask ques-

**Rittenhouse said her team of therapists does a great job of connecting with the families of the patients they serve and even puts personal funds together to purchase gas cards or school supplies for families in need. Brittany Parker, of Avon Lake, is one of the speech therapists on Rittenhouse’s team and recently became a full-time therapist in January.**

tions about.

This past spring, Rittenhouse also provided a language through literacy program at the Avon Branch of the Lorain Public Library System.

She was able to get books through Scholastic and discussed the importance of books as well as different activities that can be sparked through a book or reading.

When asked what her favorite part about her job is, Rittenhouse simply replied “helping people.”

“My goal is to be able to help these patients in a quick amount of time,” she said, adding that at that point the age of the patient doesn’t matter.

Rittenhouse keeps her skills sharp with continued learning opportunities. She said at least 30 hours of continued education is required every three years.

“I love being able to add to what I call my bag of tricks,” she said. “Not one thing works for every kid, so it’s always good to have something else that you can pull out and try.”

Treatment ideas are also shared among therapists as Rittenhouse has a team of seven speech therapists she oversees.

Physical and occupational therapists at Mercy also work together, Rittenhouse said, as that is

another way to treat the whole child.

“It’s so important to look at the whole child and the whole child, when you look at pediatrics, includes the parents,” she said.

“They might not always be in the session with us but we’re always including them before or after the session and asking how they’re doing. They’re our key to our therapy.”

Rittenhouse said her team of therapists does a great job of connecting with the families of the patients they serve and even puts personal funds together to purchase gas cards or school supplies for families in need. Brittany Parker, of Avon Lake, is one of the speech therapists on Rittenhouse’s team and recently became a full-time therapist in January.

Parker said during her clinical fellowship Rittenhouse acted as her supervisor or mentor.

“I felt like I had a special bond or unique bond with Carrie,” she said, adding that Rittenhouse met with her several times to discuss her strengths and ways she could improve.

She is so knowledgeable and able to explain things very thoroughly.”

Parker described the field as fast and ever-



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Katie Ottinger, a physical therapist assistant through Mercy, works with Jacob Jurecko, 5, during his physical therapy session July 21 at the Mercy Health and Recreation Center in Amherst.

changing, but said Rittenhouse is incredibly supportive and good a brainstorming different ways to help a patient.

Rittenhouse said she loves being able to work at Mercy and inspire the younger generation just as the nurses in her mother’s

generation inspired her. “It’s such a family place to me,” she said. “It feels like I’m coming home.”

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