

A Celebration of Life

Gilbert's growing medical community welcomes a state-of-the-art cord blood bank

BY MICHELLE TALSMA EVERSON

When a child is born, it's a special, once-in-a-lifetime occasion; something that will never happen again and a memory to be truly cherished. During this extraordinary event, there's also something else that only happens once—the opportunity to capture the baby's cord blood that is rich with stem cells, often referred to as “the building blocks of life.”

Unfortunately, a very small percentage of parents currently take advantage of this simple and potentially lifesaving opportunity. But, Gilbert's new Celebration Stem Cell Centre (CSCC)—founded by local philanthropists Bill and Sherry Lund—is looking to change that. Described as “a private umbilical cord blood bank, public cord blood donation bank, adult stem cell processing, genetic counseling and research facility,” CSCC is spreading the word about the importance of stem cell research and how it can help expectant parents save or donate this precious resource.

“The importance of cord blood is that it's full of naïve stem cells that are ideal for transplant and may help in clinical research and treating several diseases,” explains Rob Schemitsch, director of business development at CSCC. “These precious stem cells can only be collected immediately after the birth. When the baby is born, there are three options for the cord blood: to either be banked privately for future family use, to be donated and put in the national registry, or to be thrown out as medical waste.”

Currently, clinical researchers across the country are using cord blood-derived stem cells to treat a variety of diseases—everything from cancers to blood disorders—with stem cell therapy. CSCC does not conduct embryonic research, making it a non-controversial facility, Schemitsch adds.

To help raise awareness about the importance of cord blood and stem cell research, CSCC recently added to Gilbert's growing biomedical industry by opening its doors across the street from Mercy Gilbert Medical Center. As Arizona's first public umbilical cord blood bank, the high-tech facility features the latest in cutting-edge medical technology and research capabilities.

“Our goal is to provide the highest quality viable stem cells for transplant and regenerative medicine, and to work with the national registry so that researchers and patients from all over



Top: Bill and Sherry Lund pose with first donors Deidre Wilson with baby Brigid, and medical director Nabil Dib, M.D.

Above: Medical director Nabil Dib, M.D., and Sherry Lund, pose at the grand opening of the Celebration Stem Cell Centre.

the world can have access to high quality cord blood samples," Schemitsch says.

CSCC's first donation arrived in September when Valley parents Dave and Deidre Wilson donated their daughter Brigid's cord blood.

"We take in cord blood donations free of charge and privately store cord blood for both local and national families for a fee," Schemitsch explains. "Expectant parents should contact us before their 34th week to make sure everything is in order to process the cord blood. We're also working on teaming up with local hospitals to be donor hospitals to help spread the word about cord blood donations to their patients; currently Mercy Gilbert is our first donor hospital."

Once parents make the decision to either privately store or donate their child's cord blood, they can register online at on CSCC's website and enroll in either program. Schemitsch says that CSCC uses the same high quality standards for both public and private banking to process and store the stem cells.

"State-of-the-art technologies, stringent processes and high quality practices are implemented to ensure that the stem cells are of the very highest quality possible for therapeutic purposes," Schemitsch adds.

"Our clean rooms are surrounded by glass so that people can see what's going on; we're open to school tours and private tours for interested families," he continues. "On some tours, visitors might even be able to see live stem cells under a microscope."

Schemitsch adds that another important part of the work CSCC is doing is to take an active role with the hospitals to help physicians learn proper collection techniques to make the most out of every cord blood sample. They also reach out to local parenting groups and other education-based organizations to educate expectant parents and healthcare providers.

"We want to help increase the national registry inventory of cord blood units for all racial and ethnic groups," Schemitsch explains. "Expectant mothers have a unique opportunity to directly help and offer hope to other members of their community who share a similar genetic background."

As CSCC grows and establishes itself as a part of Gilbert's growing medical community, it's being led by its new medical director Nabil Dib, M.D., who is also the Director of Cardiovascular Research at Mercy Gilbert and Chandler Regional Medical Center. Dib is internationally known for his research and work regarding the use of adult stem cells to restore the health of patients with severe heart disease.

"In the future, Gilbert will be a worldwide destination for patient treatment and a center for scientists to be trained from basic science to clinical application for stem cells," Dib says.

Added to its work with stem cells, CSCC also offers genetic counseling and bone marrow match testing.

To learn more about Celebration Stem Cell Centre, visit celebrationstemcellcentre.com. ■

AZ PRO *Physiques* TRAIN WITH THE PROS!



Let us help you reach your ultimate fitness goals.



- Free Fitness assessment on First Visit.
- One-on-One Personal Training
- Custom Nutritional Plan
- Boot Camp classes available

***Holiday Gift Packages Available!**

(480) 917-7767

NW corner of Gilbert & Ray Rd.

www.azprophysiques.com