

## HEALTH

## Breast Milk 'Best Medicine' for Infants

Advocates make strides on milk bank network for moms

BY MINDY COOPER  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

In an effort to provide more milk for mothers throughout the region and the county, local community members and advocates have been working for over three years to get a local human milk bank up and running.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Oregon has the highest rate of women who breast feed their babies within the United States, which gives the region the potential to share donated milk supplies.

Within the state of Oregon, however, there isn't a functioning milk bank, which exist to screen, collect, process and dispense donated human milk as a community service and provide human milk to babies whose own mothers cannot supply the milk to meet their baby's needs.

While 10 milk banks exist throughout the country to serve and increase the health of infants every

day, June Winfield, board chairman of the Northwest Mother's Milk Bank based out of Portland, said there is a critical need for more.

Last year alone, milk banks distributed 1.4 million ounces of processed donor milk, she said, while the estimated need was 8 million ounces.

The North West Mother's Milk Bank currently exists within the state as a 'Developing Milk Bank', which means they've shown a high percentage of willing donor moms and have created a number of distribution channels throughout the region.

All that is left is the actual Milk bank, said Winfield.

"We only need the middle component," she said. "We're about half way there in our fundraising to be able to purchase equipment and hire staff, and we need community support to reach our goal soon, so we can provide 'best medicine' to NW infants."



Peggy Andrews, a lactation consultant at Adventist Medical Center, puts donor milk in the freezer to be later packed and shipped by FedEx to a California milk bank.

According to Winfield, when a mother's own milk is not available, the next best thing is banked donor milk.

"The majority of breast milk from milk banks goes to ill and vulnerable infants," she said. "Evidence shows breast milk is the best medicine for these infants."

Winfield said, however, not enough people realize human milk banks exist. "People have no idea,"

she said. "There is a need for education and awareness, even among mothers who have breast fed their children."

According to Julie Nash, a lactation consultant for Adventist Medical Center in southeast Portland, one reason for the lack of education surrounding the need for more breast milk banks within the country is because of the high use of formula as a milk substitute for ba-



Baby Harley, Joanne Ransom and donor mom Krystal, who has donated more than 600 ounces of breast milk for other nursing mothers, at a clinic in Newberg.

bies.

"Through multiple-billion dollar marketing campaigns on behalf of the formula companies, as well as the lack of education and research in the field, there has been this idea that formula is just as good as human milk," said Nash. "But we know now that it's not. Not even close."

According to both Nash and Winfield, there has long been a common misconception that formula is a comparable alternative to breast milk. Both say, however, breast milk is the best for human babies, and that is the bottom line.

"A formula is a product that is basically derived from cow's milk, which is obviously a completely different species," said Nash. "And the proteins are much more difficult for human babies to digest and break down."

Breast milk contains live cells and immunities the mother has built up, and they can't put this into formula, said Winfield.

Although there is yet to be a functioning milk bank within the state, progress has been made. Several Oregon and southwest Washington facilities exist as donor drop-off sites, including nine in Oregon and one in Washington.

One such location is the Adventist Medical Center which is where Nash works with inpatient and outpatient new mothers and mothers on a daily basis.

After the donating mothers go through a screening process, she drops off her frozen donated breast milk at one of the collection sites, which then ships the milk to one of the milk banks in California or Colorado.

Winfield said, however, once the local milk bank group attains the

proper equipment, they will not have to ship the milk out of state.

The mother will donate her milk, and it will be received, pasteurized and cultured in Portland, she said. "It will be a much shorter, cheaper and faster trip for the milk."

According to Winfield, the North West Mothers Milk Bank has made tremendous progress in the past year, especially with the support from individuals and community donors. Last year in September, she said they raised \$30,000 at a fundraising event, and Providence Health and Services has provided new office space.

"We still need funds to purchase equipment and hire staff," she said. "Any donation, no matter how small, is really going to really help us."

The organization is looking for support to attain important pieces of equipment, including a milk ana-

lyzer, pasteurizer, a walk-in freezer, bottle filling system, two commercial freezers, commercial dishwasher, cap sealer, and an ice maker.

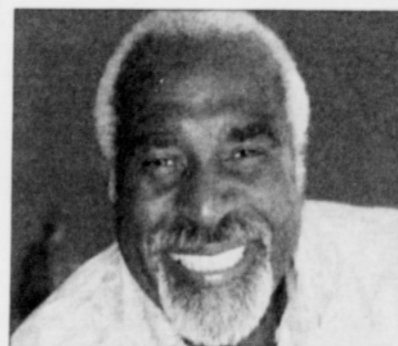
Coming up next month, Winfield also said the group will be holding two open houses for the community to visit its office and lab space to take a deeper look into how a milk bank works and why it is important.

"Babies are meant to drink human milk," said Nash. "That is how they will thrive and be the healthiest."

And Winfield agrees.

"The milk bank is most exciting for our region because it will improve the health of our community," she said. "We all benefit when our community is healthier."

For more information about the Northwest North West Mothers Milk Bank and other milk banks visit [nwmmb.org](http://nwmmb.org).



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