

# Being Ready for the Unexpected

## New mom appreciates the resources and support when baby arrives earlier than planned

With ten weeks left to go in her pregnancy, Karri Henry was anxiously awaiting the arrival of her first baby. It had been a problem-free pregnancy, so she was surprised when her blood pressure reading was abnormally high at her 30-week prenatal doctor visit. Karri's doctor, obstetrician-gynecologist Frederick Durer, MD, put her on bed rest to see if that would help.

A week later, with her blood pressure still high, Dr. Durer referred Karri to St. Luke's Hospital for additional tests. The results revealed that Karri's liver enzymes were elevated and her platelet levels were falling, both classic symptoms of a dangerous pregnancy complication called HELLP syndrome. If left untreated, it can cause liver damage and other serious health risks for the mother and unborn baby. Delivering the baby as soon as possible, even if premature, is the only way to relieve the syndrome.

"I was supposed to start birthing classes that week," said Karri, who instead was admitted to the hospital on bed rest and induced the next day. "We didn't even have the baby furniture yet and my first baby shower was planned for the next week," recalled Karri. For her husband, Bill, it was a nerve-racking few days. He worried about Karri's health and that something might go wrong with the baby.

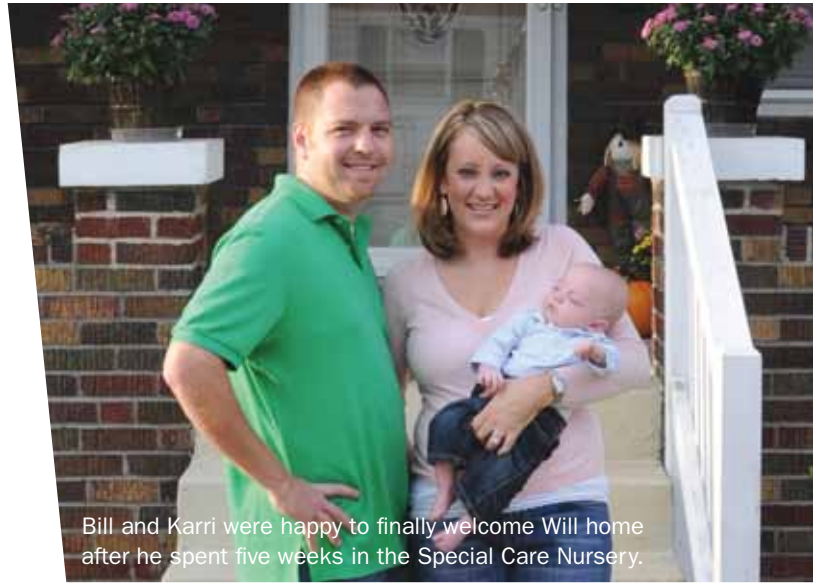
Despite the induction, Karri's labor didn't progress. Her baby had to be delivered by Cesarean section. William (Will) Henry

entered the world eight weeks early – at 3 pounds, 5 ounces, and measuring 16-and-a-half inches. Although relatively healthy, little Will needed some intensive care, including respiratory support and help with feeding. He was admitted to St. Luke's Level II Special Care Nursery, just down the hall from Karri's postpartum suite.

The Special Care Nursery is equipped to care for premature infants, including those delivered as early as 30 weeks, and babies with other special needs such as respiratory difficulties, congenital anomalies, infection, low blood glucose levels, and the need for IV therapy. Babies are cared for by neonatologists, pediatricians, certified neonatal nurse practitioners and specially trained nursing staff. In rare cases where a newborn may require more intensive care than the Special Care Nursery is able to provide, St. Luke's is able to supervise transferring the baby to an infant critical care unit.

A common condition among premature infants, reflux was one of Will's biggest issues. His was so severe that it made breastfeeding and bottle-feeding impossible. In the Special Care Nursery he was able to receive tube feedings and be closely monitored around the clock by neonatal specialists.

"The neonatologist saw Will every day and came to my room to talk with me about what was going on, what to expect and where Will needed to be before he could go home," said Karri. "The nurses were great too. They were



Bill and Karri were happy to finally welcome Will home after he spent five weeks in the Special Care Nursery.

very good at explaining everything. They would bring up things that I didn't even know to ask.”

Since Karri planned to, but wasn't able to breastfeed Will, she also appreciated the one-on-one guidance she received from St. Luke's on-site lactation consultants. They helped show her how to pump breastmilk for Will and she was able to rent a breast pump while in the hospital through St. Luke's on-site Lactation Center.

Although she knew he was in good hands, when it was time for Karri to be discharged from the hospital, she found it very hard not being able to take Will home with her. He was progressing well, but still required the care and supervision of the Special Care Nursery. So Karri was grateful she could visit and spend time with him every day.

The Special Care Nursery staff helped her stay involved in Will's care and showed her how to do Kangaroo Care, where she could lay him in just a diaper on her chest, providing important skin-to-skin contact.

“It was good for bonding and Will liked it,” said Karri.

Five weeks after his birth – and with two more pounds packed on – Will was finally able to go home.

Today Will is doing great and Karri, who has spent years with children as a grade school special education teacher, loves being a mom. And she and Will have been back to St. Luke's Special Care Nursery, but just as visitors – to see the staff and share Will's progress.

Although Karri never even expected to meet most of them, she now admits, “We formed a real friendship with a lot of the staff.” ■