

Project brings comfort to mothers of 'heaven born' babies

ST. LOUIS - When Maureen Day was just 11 weeks into her pregnancy, she learned the devastating news that her baby was not developing properly.

Recalling that Ms. Day years ago when she learned the news at the doctor's office that her daughter Katie's heart was no longer beating, Ms. Day said she was shocked at "how devastated I was. It caught me off-guard."

In the days and weeks following her miscarriage, Day, the mother of five, spent much of her time reading on the Internet, including stories of other women who had experienced the same kind of loss and anything else she could get her hands on that had to do with miscarriage and infant death.

By the end of that year, Ms. Day had taken that energy, and her background as a professional graphic artist, and turned it into a tangible source of comfort for women grieving the loss of their baby.

Launched in 2002, Ms. Day's nonprofit organization, Heaven Born, provides small, handmade fleece pillows to mothers who have suffered an early pregnancy loss. Tucked inside a small pocket on the front of the pillow is a booklet with tips on how to cope with the emotions that follow a pregnancy loss.

The pillow "is just something for a mother, when you don't have anything to hold," she noted.

The attention is in the details, too. Before the pillows are stuffed and sewn by her and a small crew of volunteers, the fleece material is washed in a detergent

especially made for laundering infant clothing.

“I wanted it to have a nice, soothing smell,” Ms. Day said. “A woman e-mailed me once and said ‘the smell is what I smell when I have dreams about my baby.’”

Since its inception, Heaven Born has handcrafted about 1,000 pillows, which have been provided at cost to several hospitals in St. Louis. Ms. Day also has since expanded the effort to other hospitals outside the St. Louis area, including ones in Springfield, Mo., and Michigan. Individual pillows also can be ordered at the organization’s Web site, www.heavenborn.com.

“I have sent them to England, Ireland - places all over, for people who just happened upon the Web site,” she said, adding that the site has received more than 8,000 visitors since it was launched in 2006.

Day’s physician, Dr. Kent Snowden at St. John’s Mercy Medical Center in St. Louis, offered his support and provided several suggestions for the booklet.

“I wanted to make something in a small, digestible format,” she said. “Just a little something to read.”

Tips in the booklet include some of the feelings an individual might experience after the loss, how to take care of one’s self and communicate with a spouse and specific suggestions on how to honor the baby.

With the help of a friend in the printing business and her doctor, Ms. Day had several thousand copies of the booklet printed. She also went to a class to learn basic sewing techniques so she could make the pillows.

St. John’s Mercy was the first to show interest in the effort, after Ms. Day was connected with Maggie Loyet, coordinator of the Mercy HeartPrints program at the

medical center.

“She’s been wonderful,” said Day.

Ms. Day also has established a Heaven Born craft community for small groups who would like to sew pillows on their own, “to help those moms and honor their babies,” she said. Groups are provided with supplies and instructions on how to make the pillows as well as brochures and other promotional materials.

“And then there’s the craft therapy part. This is a nice opportunity to get together and share,” she said.

“I told God, ‘This is your deal. This is whatever you make it. Whether it’s 10 pillows or 10 million pillows, it’s all yours.’”