





## DIRECTOR'S

I FTTFR

ot too long ago I was driving and happened to tune into a TED Talk. A psychologist who has spent considerable time helping those with PTSD was giving a lecture. For some reason I didn't switch stations, for which I am glad.

He shared that of the many people he has treated, there is a percentage who come through the trauma as "better" people. He used the term "Post Traumatic Growth." He stated that as they worked through their own emotional hurdles, they emerged more caring, more empathetic, and more giving than they had been previous to their personal emotional trauma. It hit me - this perfectly captured so much of the folks that make Tiny Miracles what it is today.

I thought of our mentors, who having dealt with the emotional challenge of prematurity, have now become the beacon of hope for countless families. I thought of our Board, who have taken their personal traumas and redirected them to helping others walking the same path. I thought of our

"As TTMF has grown and continues to reach out to greater numbers of families with preemies, it is the renewed sense of caring, empathy, and giving that lights the way for so many during dark times."

many volunteers, who give back by the countless hours they spend on numerous tasks and projects. In short, I came to realize that The Tiny Miracles Foundation exemplifies growth.

As TTMF grows and continues to reach out to greater numbers of families with preemies, it is the renewed sense of caring, empathy, and giving

that lights the way for so many during dark times. As always, I remain humbled and honored to be a part of this giving family.



George Colabella
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## PRESIDENT'S

LETTER

As I approach the end of my 2<sup>nd</sup> year as President of the Board of Directors of The Tiny Miracles Foundation, I reflect on the great work we are doing for the families of premature babies we have touched. The Board continues to strengthen its strategic direction on building a stronger foundation which will allow for the continued growth and enrichment of our programs, along with the efforts of our dedicated staff.

This past year, two outstanding Board Members, Eric Broder and Peggy Sawala finished their terms after 6 years. We have been blessed, on multiple levels, by their and their spouses many hours of volunteering. Eric and Lisa Broder have served on our governance and events committees and

their generous philanthropic gifts have sustained our growth. Peggy and Scott Sawala have been very generous with their time with the *Look At Me Now* video and with Peggy's many hours on our Programs Committee and Financial Assistance Program (FAP). Peggy remains our lead parent mentor at Stamford Hospital. The Broders and Sawalas continue to remain dedicated supporters and advocates of TTMF. Thank you for all of your service to families of premature babies in our community.

This year we have been honored with the addition of three new directors: Carol Bauer, Liam Burke, and Alyssa Kent. Carol Bauer is currently on the Boards of Norwalk Hospital and Norwalk Hospital Foundation as

"I take the time to reflect on the great work we are doing by the many lives of families of premature babies we have touched."

an Emeritus Trustee, where she served for over forty years as a volunteer in the ER, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and presently as a Chaplain. Her chaplaincy specializes in Maternal and Child Health and she ministers to parents who have lost children or babies. Carol and her husband, George, have been ongoing supporters of TTMF.



## *LEADERSHIP*

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Thank you for all you do. One of our very special NICU graduates just celebrated his 8th birthday. *In lieu of presents, he* requested donations be made to Tiny Miracles. -NURSE MANAGER,

STAMFORD HOSPITAL

My mentor has not only guided me throughout this difficult time but has always made me feel very optimistic. Thank you for all the love and hard work. -MOM OF 28-WEEKER

Thank you for the generosity you have bestowed upon us - the financial support has allowed us some relief and it is very much appreciated

-MOM OF 32-WEEK TWINS

When I read the story behind the Snoedel, it *melted my heart. My* daughter will be a year old and still holds onto it as if she was still in the NICU. Thank you for the things you've done, whether they be little or big.

—MOM FROM DANBURY HOSPITAL

#### PRESIDENT'S LETTER CON'T

Liam Burke is an attorney at Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey LLP in Stamford, CT. He has experience in a broad array of practice areas. His twin boys, Shepard and Griffin, were born prematurely at 27 weeks and spent nearly 3 months in the NICU. Liam and his wife, Heather, are currently training to be parent mentors.

Alyssa Kent is an Architect at Spinnaker Real Estate Partners in Norwalk, CT. Alyssa is the co-chair of the NICU Family advisory council at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital where she and her husband, Heath, spent time in the NICU with all three of their children. She and her family founded Go Ginny Go in 2012, in honor of their daughter Virginia who spent 124 days in the NICU.

The board remains committed to advancing the mission of The Tiny Miracles Foundation and is grateful for the many volunteers and

donors who continue to be steadfast supporters while growing our "Tiny Miracles Family."



Marisela Esposito PRESIDENT



## *MIRACLE STORY*

ANTONELOS FAMILY

wish to share the story of our tiny Imiracles, Theoharis ("Harry") and Eftihia ("Effie"). Now two healthy, curious and energetic 18 month olds, you'd never guess the hardships they faced at the very start of their lives.

I learned I was pregnant with twins in July of 2016. My fiancé Robert and I were overjoyed. The anticipation of the twins' arrival excited everyone and brought our families hope for the future. I reminded my parents that their grandbabies and I needed them more than ever.

At my 20 week OBGYN appointment. I was informed that I was at risk of preterm labor at any time and prescribed strict bed rest, effective immediately. An overwhelming darkness ensued. As I lay on the couch for the next 6 weeks, I felt my world beginning to unravel. No one I knew had ever been in my predicament. I slept a lot and refused most visitors. The faint sensation of Effie and Harry's sweet nudges and kicks was the only thing that made me happy.

In December 2016, at 26 weeks pregnant, I qualified for bed rest at Norwalk Hospital. During this stay, TTMF volunteers stopped by my room. They shared stories of their deliveries, NICU stays, and post-NICU experiences, as well as current pictures of their beautiful children. For the first time in 6 weeks I wanted to talk and to listen to someone. The volunteers knew exactly how I felt and helped me prepare for what may come: They reignited my hope that things would be ok.

On January 16, 2017, our babies, a mere 28 weeks and 3 days gestation, were born. I turned to my fiancé - his words forever engrained into my brain "Elpida, like it or not, we're meeting Harry and Effie today."

Harry was delivered first. Weighing 2 pounds 11 ounces, he was not breathing and needed to be resuscitated. Effie came minutes later, weighing 2 pounds 8 ounces. Her one courageous squeak was music to our ears as they rushed her out. I was wheeled to the NICU shortly thereafter to meet them for the very first time. The nurses pulled their fragile little bodies, covered in tubes and patches, out of the isolettes. Everything felt so surreal and unnatural until they placed them, one by one, onto my chest. At that moment I became a mother.

The next morning, I limped over to the NICU looking for our children in a roomful of isolettes. The nurses pointed to two tucked in a corner, covered with blankets - pink plaid for Effie and yellow with ducks for Harry, courtesy of TTMF. TTMF's generosity only continued: in-person check-ins, parent snack packs, preemie reading materials, doctor recommendations, specialist suggestions, and clothing donations, just to name a few. TTMF made the NICU feel like a second home to us for the next 50 or so days while Effie and Harry slowly grew stronger. The greatest gift of all, however, is the friendships I have gained from the volunteers - they gave me confidence and supported me. Something I will be forever grateful for.

Our NICU days were grueling truly an emotional rollercoaster, fraught with worry, anxiety and guilt. Eventually the good days started outnumbering the bad and our tiny warriors persevered! The patience and optimism of TTMF helped us through those long, hard days.

Our babies' discharge from the NICU was bittersweet; my moth-





er passed away. Harry inherited her eyes and Effie her name and both had her incredibly strong will to live. But the loss of my mother was a double blow; my dad had passed away while I was on bedrest.

Our twins were very lucky to come home from the hospital relatively unscathed. Preemie families across the country face unimaginable health issues and economic challenges. I am comforted knowing there is a way to help and in our case, pay it forward. Donations to dedicated organizations such as TTMF, offer compassion and support well beyond NICU doors, aiding and connecting preemie families. I just cannot say enough great things about TTMF. TTMF, thank you for letting me share the story of our tiny but mighty miracles.



## MIRACLE STORY

PONCE FAMILY

A year ago my daughter Melanie Ponce was born at 25 weeks of pregnancy, weighing 1lb and 140z. She was born during a trip to Baltimore. Due to circumstances, my baby and I had to stay in Baltimore for two and a half months until Melanie was strong enough to return to Stamford, CT, where my family and I live.

Initially the doctors gave me hope that my baby would remain in me and that in about two to three days we would return home. My husband and my older daughter had to return to CT two days after I checked into the hospital. On April 13th, my baby decided to come into this world. I was totally alone in Baltimore on that day, with a lot of fear and sadness seeing my baby fighting for her life.

Someone very special in our lives told me that she had friends who went through the same thing, and that soon a very special person was going to call me. That person was Marisela. She told me she also gave birth to a preemie at 25.3 weeks, and that she worked with a group of moms with premature babies called The Tiny Miracles Foundation.

When I heard the name I realized that indeed I had in my life and in my hands a tiny miracle and that my baby was teaching me how to fight in life. Marisela encouraged me a lot, she told me not to lose faith, and explained how little by little my baby would grow. She arranged for TTMF to financially help my family's train trip so they could come to visit us in Baltimore. Also, Tiny Miracles sent my older daughter books to understand why her sister was born so tiny. They also sent me many beautiful things that I could use with my baby. What I liked the most, and gave me strength, was all the support I received from the program, even though I was still in Baltimore. Marisela did everything possible to ensure that TTMF would give me all the help we needed. I am so grateful for everything they gave me.

I would like to help other mothers like me who are going through or have gone through the same situation. I really like that despite the fact that we are no longer in the hospital, TTMF still checks on us. There are many group activities available for my baby and she really enjoys spending time with all the babies. I love that I can spend time with other mothers who have so much in common with me, and I enjoy being able to share my experiences and anecdotes. Thanks to what they taught me, I can be part of the team that gives support to moms who speak Spanish and who are going through this experience with their beautiful babies.

## HISTORIA DE UN MILAGRO

FAMILIA PONCE -

ace un año di a luz a mi hija Melanie Ponce con tan solo 25 semanas de embarazo y pesando ilb y 140z. Nació mientras estábamos de viaje en Baltimore. Debido a circunstancias, mi bebé y yo tuvimos que quedarnos en Baltimore por dos meses y medio hasta que Melanie pudiera estar lo suficientemente fuerte para regresar a Stamford, CT, donde mi familia y yo vivimos.

Inicialmente los doctores me daban esperanzas de que mi bebé se mantendría dentro de mí y que en unos dos o tres días podríamos regresar a casa. Mi esposo y mi hija mayor tenían que regresar a CT dos días después que yo ingresé al hospital. El 13 de abril, mi bebé decidió venir al mundo. Ese día, yo estaba completamente sola en Baltimore, con mucho miedo y tristeza viendo a mi bebé luchar por su vida.

Alguien muy especial en nuestras vidas me dijo que tenía amigas que habían pasado por lo mismo y que pronto una persona especial me llamaría. Esa persona fue Marisela. Me dijo que ella también había dado a luz a una bebé prematura de 25.3 semanas y que trabaja con un grupo de mamás con bebés prematuros llamado The Tiny Miracles Foundation.

Cuando escuché este nombre me di cuenta que de hecho tenía en mi vida y en mis manos un pequeño milagro y que mi bebé me estaba enseñando a cómo luchar por la vida. Marisela me dio mucho ánimo, me dijo que no perdiera la fe y me explicó cómo poco a poco mi bebé crecería. Hizo los arreglos para que TTMF financiara el viaje en tren de mi familia y así pudieran visitarnos a Baltimore. Incluso, Tiny Miracles le envió libros a mi hija mayor para que pudiera entender por qué su hermanita había nacido tan pequeñita. También me enviaron muchas cosas bellas que yo podía usar con mi bebé.

Lo que más me gustó, y me dio fortaleza, fue todo el apoyo que recibí del programa, a pesar de que todavía estaba en Baltimore. Marisela hizo todo lo posible para asegurar que TTMF nos diera la ayuda que tanto necesitábamos. Estoy muy agradecida por todo lo que me dieron.

Yo quisiera ayudar a otras madres que, como yo, están pasando o pasaron por la misma situación. Me encanta que a pesar de que ya no estamos en el hospital, ellos se mantienen en contacto. Hay muchas actividades de grupo disponibles para mi bebé y a ella le encanta estar con otros bebés. Por mi parte, disfruto mucho poder compartir mis experiencias y anécdotas con otras mamás que tienen tanto en común conmigo. Gracias a lo que me enseñaron puedo ser parte del equipo que da apoyo a madres que hablan español y que atraviesan por esta situación con sus hermosos bebés.



### 1ST ANNUAL TEE UP FORE PREEMIES

Under sunny skies on May 14th, 2018, more than 60 golfers took to the course at Oak Hill Park in Norwalk for the first annual Tee Up FORE Preemies. The day proved to be an unqualified success, generating funds for the many programs and services which TTMF provides for preemies and their families. We wish to extend our sincerest thanks to the golfers and sponsors whose participation made it a special day. The day would not have been possible without the many volunteers who gave so generously of their time. Hope to see everyone again next year.







- 1 Fred Paulmann and Phil Cagnassola celebrate; 2 Liam Burke, Ryan Scully, Ben Pomerantz, Mark Czeterko;
- 3 Tina VanGemert, Neda Litvak, Ann Flynn, Corinne Halliday

### GIFT A MIRACLE HOLIDAY BOUTIQUE



TTMF hosted a Holiday Boutique and Luncheon at the Wee Burn Country Club in November, 2017. The featured guest was Emme, globally recognized as a women's advocate for positive body image. With the conviction that beauty comes in all shapes and sizes, Emme paved the way and gave women the platform to feel beautiful and empowered. Emme shared with the group her life journey as a model, mom, author and speaker. Proceeds from the Boutique benefited the programs and services of Tiny Miracles.

Emme visits with a vendor at the shopping boutique



### UNDER THE SEA

On Sunday, June 3, 2018, families of premature babies, children, and friends enjoyed an afternoon at the Maritime Aguarium in Norwalk. Our annual family event was an opportunity for parents and children to renew acquaintances and make new friends. This was the first time TTMF held its' family day at the aquarium and it proved to be a good time for all. Children had the opportunity to touch rays, observe several sharks, revel at the antics of the seals, and enjoy many more entertaining and educational exhibits. A truly fun day!



1 Laura, Braden, and Blake Franchi 2 Hudson, Micah & Riley Rarey 3 Wysocki Family





### WORLD PREMATURITY DAY

On November 16, 2017, TTMF held its 3rd annual Artwork Born Ahead of Its Time celebrating World Prematurity Day. Dozens of preemies from newborns to adults participated in the exhibit at the Westport Arts Center. TTMF friends and families were able to view the preemie masterpieces while enjoying an evening out. Families connected over paintings, photographs and sculptures while raising awareness about prematurity.







1 Luke Lohnes; 2 Guest enjoying the art exhibit; 3 Matilda Ruehlman

"I just wanted to say thank you for all of your kindness and generosity. All of you helped us get through a very emotional and challenging time. I will always be grateful and keep all of you in my heart.

-MOTHER OF 27-WEEKER

I loved making blankets for families in the NICU. It makes me really happy that these blankets are giving hope to families, and that even one blanket might make a huge difference in people's lives.

-VOLUNTEER FROM MIDDLESEX MIDDLE SCHOOL, DARIEN



## A TIME OF

GROWTH

The Tiny Miracles Foundation remains committed to addressing the challenges that come with the continued rise in the number of premature births in our community. TTMF is not just maintaining its full continuum of services, programs, and assistance, but is actively expanding and enriching the many services provided to preemies and their families.

#### **MENTOR PROGRAM**

Over the past year, the program has grown, adding seven new in-hospital mentors along with several virtual mentors. The mentor training program, led by TTMF Director of Family Services Elisabeth Schneider, has provided mentors with additional insights, knowledge, and skills all of which make their interaction with parents more dynamic and supportive. The coming year will see the addition of virtual training webinars, presentations by leading experts in the field,

team building and role playing. In addition, hospital team meetings with key hospital staff have been successful, further enhancing our relations with our 5 partner hospitals as well as enhancing the personal experiences of the TTMF mentors.

#### **BEREAVEMENT PROGRAM**

Reflective of the tragedy of loss, this program has been enhanced significantly over the past year. In response to the needs in our community and efforts by our team and partner hospitals, TTMF has been at the forefront in numerous efforts.

The TTMF Director of Family Services, Elisabeth Schneider, spoke at Evening of Remembrance at Stamford Hospital in October 2017. TTMF partnered with Yale New Haven Hospital/Bridgeport Campus to host a Bereavement Lecture, attended by physicians, nurses, social workers, and other professionals. Elisabeth

highlighted the means of providing psychosocial support for families going through a perinatal loss. In addition, TTMF is providing one-on-one consultations and support services for bereaved families, providing an understanding of resources and services available to help them in the healing process.

#### ST. VINCENT'S MEDICAL CENTER

St. Vincent's became TTMF's fifth partner hospital. Full services, programs, and assistance are being provided, benefitting the preemies in the NICU and their families. TTMF has also fully furnished a Family Resource Room, providing a welcoming respite for families visiting their preemie. The room includes comfortable furniture, educational materials, television, and refreshments. In addition, the Family Room serves as a quiet spot for parents to meet with physicians and medical staff





## SPECIAL

ver the past year, TTMF has been most fortunate to receive support from a number of community groups who "adopted" Tiny Miracles. Through a number of different activities they raised considerable funds to enable TTMF to continue its mission of responding to the many parents and preemies who turn to us.

#### MACRO RISK ADVISORS

MRA's team is comprised of experienced professionals with a deep understanding of the markets and risk dynamics. An important part of MRA's mission is to support organizations who have made a difference to individuals and families in the MRA community through their annual Charity Trading Day. Marisela Esposito (Board President) and Tom Noto (husband of TTMF co-founder), made a special presentation to this charitable group with the introduction by Gregg Wysocki, dad of a 29.5 week preemie and head of MRA product sales. As a result, TTMF was selected as one of this year's 6 recipients, receiving a significant gift. The generosity of MRA

will translate into direct and immediate benefits to those whom TTMF has the privilege to serve. A very special "thank you" to MRA for believing in Tiny Miracles and our mission.



### **CWFL CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD BOWL-A-THON**

Many thanks to Cushman & Wakefield for selecting The Tiny Miracles Foundation as the beneficiary of their annual Future Leaders Bowl-a-Thon. held in November 2017. The Bowl-A-Thon set a record for the highest amount ever raised through this event.

The event, attended by real estate professionals, not only raised significant funds for TTMF, but also brought awareness to our programs and services.

### 100 WOMEN WHO CARE, **FAIRFIELD COUNTY**

Following a heartfelt presentation by Marisela Esposito at their gathering, 100 Women selected Tiny Miracles as their charity of choice. 100 Women Who Care is a group of women who gather four times a year for a onehour meeting, and each member donates \$100 to a charity that the group selects. Their donation will have a great impact on the many programs of TTMF. We are fortunate to have 100 Women Who Care - Fairfield County as a member of the Tiny Miracles family.



#### **BLANKETS** AND SNOEDEL

Bringing great comfort to both preemies and parents are the Snoedels (bonding doll) and isolette covers/ blankets, provided via the **Tiny Treasures Program of** TTMF. We wish to thank the many community volunteers who gave so generously of their time to personalize more than 500 isolette blankets. We also wish to acknowledge the many donors who allowed us to purchase Snoedels for all the preemies in our partner hospitals.





## MIRACLE

July 1, 2017-June 30, 2018

PLEASE NOTE THAT DUE TO THE CHANGE OF DATE OF THE ANNUAL GALA (NOVEMBER 2018), GALA GIFTS AND SPONSORSHIPS ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THIS LISTING. THEY WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER.

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#### Although space does not allow us to publicly acknowledge donors of under \$100, we are

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