Sisters celebrating cousins:
Baby boys born hours apart

TWO SISTERS received the ultimate gift during the holiday season. Susan Martinez, 24, and Ana Cortez, 32, both delivered baby boys at the MGH on Dec. 28, both by way of cesarean section, and just under four hours apart.

“It just happened that we were pregnant at the same time,” says Cortez. “I told Susan first and after that she started to have pregnancy symptoms. I said, ‘I’m pregnant, are you pregnant?’ And she said no. Then she took the test and she was!”

Cortez’s son, Lorenzo Revolorio, was born at 10:30 am weighing almost 10 pounds. Martinez’s son, Noah, was born at 2:01 pm weighing 8 pounds, 8 ounces.

“I was shocked,” says Martinez, who also has a daughter, Zayanni, 6. “I thought it was weird, but we’re already texting each other from our rooms to see what’s going on, and checking in to see how the babies are doing.”

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Car-free commuting

WALKING. Running. Bicycling. Taking public transportation. Commuting to work doesn’t have to mean being stuck in a car in bumper-to-bumper traffic every day. Many commuters avoid driving, choosing instead to log some miles of physical activity on their commute. Two MGHers who opt for exercise recently were honored with Workout to Work Awards from A Better City Transportation Management Association (ABC TMA) for Most Car Free Days to Work.

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Donate life: Honoring organ donors at the Rose Parade

KEVIN SULLIVAN loved performing magic tricks. For one trick, he needed to borrow a friend’s license, and he spotted a little red heart in the corner. “What’s that?” he asked,” says Debbie Sullivan, Kevin’s mother. “After learning what it represented, he immediately declared ‘well of course I’d be an organ donor. I’m awesome! My organs are awesome!’”

In September 2014, Kevin fell from a ladder at work, suffered severe brain trauma and passed away at age 31. But as he did throughout his life, he continued to give back to others through the gift of organ donation. At this year’s Rose Parade in Pasadena, California, a floragraph of Kevin – an MGH organ donor – adorned the Donate Life Rose Parade Float.

Kevin’s floragraph was one of 60 representing organ donor honorees on this year’s float, recognizing the valuable treasure of the gift of life each donor has given. Only organic materials – such as spices, seeds and crushed flowers – were used to create the floragrams. The theme of the 2016 Rose Parade was “Find Your Adventure” and Donate Life’s float was named “Treasure Life’s Journey.”

Because of Kevin’s organ donations, a 2-year-old boy is running and playing after receiving Kevin’s right kidney, the man who received his left kidney and liver is thriving, and his heart recipient was able to walk five miles just nine months after transplant. Kevin’s tissue, corneas and bones have helped many others.

Also on the float was a handwritten dedication from Peter L. Slavin, MD, MGH president. Every year a message from the MGH is placed in a dedication garden on the float to honor and remember those who gave the gift of life through organ donation. The dedication read:

“With this rose dedication, MGH publically recognizes the selfless gift of donors and their families and our staff’s dedication and commitment to organ and tissue donation and transplantation. We are honored to be a part of the 2016 Rose Parade Celebration.”

Debbie and her husband David were invited by the New England Organ Bank to attend the Rose Parade and they and their daughters, Kerrie and Katie, traveled to California to watch in the grandstands as the float traveled down Colorado Boulevard.

“When we were notified in July that Kevin would be honored on the float, we were amazed and grateful just to be asked, we had no idea this was a possibility,” says Debbie. “It is such a tremendous honor and a moving and wonderful tribute. Kevin would be proud knowing he represented the New England donors at the Rose Parade.”

More than 28,000 lives are saved each year in the U.S. through the gift of organ donation, giving hope to the more than 120,000 people awaiting a lifesaving organ transplant. In New England, more than 5,100 people are on the waiting list.

New year, new equipment: Stay fit at the Clubs at Charles River Park

WITH THE DAWN of a New Year comes with it New Year’s resolutions. The Clubs at Charles River Park (CCRP) is ready for those who are hoping to work on their fitness. With new and improved equipment and membership options, gym-goers can give their resolutions their all this year.

In preparation for the New Year, CCRP put in motion plans to replace some of their cardio machines with new models. New ellipticals have already arrived and are ready for use, and new treadmills will be arriving in the coming months.

Cliff Seeto, CCRP general manager, shared a few points for MGHers to be aware of:

- New treadmills, equipped with personal televisions and internet access, will be arriving in the first quarter 2016.
- The Clubs is offering January and February free to any MGH employee who joins in January with a 6-month commitment.
- MGH memberships now start at $6.69/week ($29/month) for 10-visit access (previously 8-visit). Unlimited memberships are $11.29/week ($49/month).
- The Clubs introduced new 30-minute Tabata classes this month, included with all memberships.
- Group training classes are available to all members of the MGH community, with or without a club membership.

“We will be emphasizing our 10-visit option, as well as our group training programs in the coming year,” says Seeto. “We’re excited about the new cardio equipment and maintain our focus on providing great employee fitness programming options at the MGH.”
Lessons in nursing: NICU nurse welcomes twins

“I ALWAYS KNEW how hard the staff worked to keep our patients growing and healthy,” says Candice Hartford, RN. “But what I hadn’t appreciated was the extent to which that affects a new mom.”

As a pregnant nurse on the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), Hartford had planned to continue to care for premature and critically ill infants until her own twins were due in November 2015. She never imagined the possibility that an early, emergency cesarean section would bring her newborns to her floor for care.

On a routine prenatal visit, however, physician Julie Jolin, MD, became concerned by Hartford’s elevated blood pressure. She recommended a betamethasone injection and further monitoring for Hartford and the babies – and soon the infants’ heart rate dips became the unnerving focus. After years of experience treating others, Hartford knew something was not right and began experiencing the fears she guides patients through as a nurse.

On Sept. 22, 2015, Hartford contacted her husband, Kenny, who hurried to the MGH and called night-shift colleagues Margaret Nelson, RN, and Cheryl Slater, RN, – the same group who had hosted Hartford’s baby shower weeks before. Within hours, Hartford was rushed to the operating room for an emergency cesarean section. Keaton, 4 pounds, and Grady, 3 pounds, arrived 6 ½ weeks early surrounded by loved ones.

Throughout the newborns’ three-week hospital stay – which included neonatal care by MGH neonatologists Jonathan Cronin, MD, and Melissa Woythaler, DO, as well as respiratory specialists to ensure Keaton and Grady were maturing and growing – Hartford remained calm. “The staff’s attention to small details, like weight gain updates or when a baby smiles, comforts nervous parents. My friends paused to teach Kenny techniques he’d need to know when we finally could take our boys home. That meant everything,” says Hartford.

She says she had faith in the NICU team and understood their work from the provider perspective. With her family safe, she didn’t need to think as a nurse, but as a mom.

“Even though the delivery of the twins was unexpected, the entire NICU team was able to rally around Candice and provide excellent comprehensive care to Keaton, Grady and the family, as we do for any patient we care for,” says Cronin.

Hartford will put these lessons into practice in January when she returns to her job in the NICU. “These have been trying months, but my colleagues – who are more like family – have been extremely supportive. They’ve taught me how to be a better nurse, but most importantly, they’ve provided the best care for the most important little people in my life. I know that I am a better NICU nurse because of my personal experience.”

‘What matters in the end’

DECEMBER marked five years since the launch of the Robert Leffert, MD, Memorial Lecture: Living Well in the Face of Serious Illness. The annual talk, on Dec. 16 in the O’Keeffe Auditorium, featured Atul Gawande, MD, MPH, a surgeon at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, and nationally known author and public health researcher. Gawande presented “Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End.”

The lecture series was created to honor Leffert, who served as chief of the MGH Department of Rehabilitation Medicine and the MGH Surgical Upper Extremity Rehabilitation Unit before his death in 2008. It is made possible through the support of Leffert’s daughter, Lisa Leffert, MD, chief of Obstetric Anesthesia, and her husband, Lee Schwamm, MD, executive vice chairman of Neurology and director of Acute Stroke Services.

During her welcoming remarks, Vicki Jackson, MD, MPH, chief of the Division of Palliative Care, thanked the Leffert/Schwamm family for their dedication to supporting and advancing the field of palliative care. “This lecture is a vital part of our programming for the year and it allows us to bring national leaders like Atul to engage our community in conversation.”
— Transportation award

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“I bike to commute to work every morning and back home every evening – about 10 miles per day. I love biking because it saves me a lot of time and keeps me fit,” says Ioannis Sanidas, a research fellow in the MGH Cancer Center, recipient of Most Car Free Days Bicycling Award.

Sanidas – who lives near Harvard Square and works in Charlestown – would face more than an hour-long commute by bus, train or car. So for 212 days last year, he biked to work, which takes him at most 30 minutes. Bicycle parking is available at many hospital buildings for employees. Sanidas says, “MGH really made an effort to motivate employees to bike by installing bike parking lots and bike repair stations last year.”

Getting to the MBTA bus stop in Dorchester became difficult last winter for Catherine Schiavo-White, of the Department of Orthopædics, awarded the Most Car Free Days and Most Miles Walked Award. “I started walking more last winter after all the snowstorms because the buses were running very slowly. I have just kept it up because I really enjoy the daily walk,” she says. Schiavo-White now walks to and from the train station, about two miles round-trip. “I only use my car on the weekends. I try to walk to most places I have to go after work or on the weekends. Walking is good exercise.”

The MGH also received ABC TMA’s Outstanding Large Employer award. In addition to the subsidized MBTA pass purchase program, the hospital offers an array of commuting services as a member of the ABC TMA. MGH employees have free access to the benefits offered by ABC TMA, such as the Workout to Work and carpool and vanpool subsidies. “By participating in these benefits, not only do employees win awards, but the MGH and the environment also wins,” says Esther Maycock-Thorne, manager of Parking and Commuter Services. “Our goal is to provide alternative choices rather than driving to work.”

Hospital employees who don’t drive to work also can sign up for the Guaranteed Ride Home program. In case of unscheduled overtime, illness or an emergency, this program provides up to six free cab rides home per year. Visit www.abctma.com/commuters for more information and to register.

“I don’t use my bike only when it is extremely cold or it is raining heavily,” says Sanidas. “I really like the ABC TMA program. It is an extra motivation to bike to work. I hope my story can serve as extra motivation for my colleagues to commute to work by bike as well.”

— Sisters celebrating cousins

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As for how frequently this circumstance occurs at the MGH, Martinez’s physician, Lauren Hanley, MD, of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department, says this is the first time she has seen sisters have their babies on the same day in her 15 years working at the hospital.

“I found out a couple of months before the scheduled delivery date that Susan’s sister was also planning her cesarean birth on the same day and was also a patient in our practice,” says Hanley. “We thought this was very exciting and unusual. I was not aware that the cousin was a boy, but we talked about how unique it is for cousins to be born in the same hospital just hours apart.”

Cortez says it was nice to go through her pregnancy with her sister, and she and Martinez couldn’t wait to see what their babies would look like. The family is already close – Martinez babysat her sister’s other two children, Andrea, 9, and Julissa, 4, until it was time for her to give birth to her own bundle of joy. The sisters say the newest additions will strengthen that bond.

“We go camping a lot, so they’ll go together, and they’ll share everything,” says Cortez. “As for everything else, we’ll wait and see what happens.”

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