

# ALABAMA'S

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## Preventing premature births is new five-year focus

**P**remature births are costly in both human and economic terms because of the disabilities which often result. Rarely do premature babies have the same abilities as infants born at term. Parents of infants born too soon and too small sometimes must learn to cope with serious challenges such as cerebral palsy, blindness and hearing loss in their children.

The two-day State of Alabama Perinatal Conference March 14-15 in Montgomery dealt with the subject, "Prematurity: In Search of Solutions." The Bureau of Family Health Services and the March of Dimes sponsored the conference.

The conference agenda covered these topics: regional perinatal reports from each of the five perinatal regions, effective systems of perinatal care, racial disparities in pregnancy outcomes, the effects of multicultural issues on obstetrical care, neonatology trends and issues, pain management in the newborn, the impact of perinatal care on preterm birth, necrotizing enterocolitis, obstetrics: new thoughts on management of the high risk patient, neurological outcomes in extremely low birthweight infants, and smallpox.

The increasing number of babies being born prematurely is an area of major concern in Alabama. Larger numbers of very small infants are surviving, and very small babies are at high risk for developing major long-term physical and cognitive problems with consequences that impact families and state resources. In 1990, 13.8 percent of births in Alabama were premature. There was an increase to 16.7 percent by 2001. An additional indicator of infant morbidity is the number



Dr. Tom Miller, director of the Bureau of Family Health Services, addresses the perinatal conference.

of newborns being admitted to neonatal intensive care units. Alabama has seen a 10-year trend of increased neonatal intensive care unit admissions. There were 4,094 admissions to Alabama NICUs in 2001.

Concerted action is being taken to address the complex problems related to prematurity in the state. "We are starting a five-year public awareness campaign with the March of Dimes for prevention and care for prematurity hoping to make a significant reduction in premature births," said Gene Hamrick, RN, EdD, State Perinatal director. "The response from the medical community regarding the March of Dimes campaign has been very positive."

Alabama's infant mortality rate remains among the highest in the nation at 9.4 per 1,000 live births. Racial disparity is a troubling component of both infant mortality

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# Sharon Whalen ‘miraculously’ reunites with her birth mother and siblings

In public health we often refer to outcome measures. For Sharon Whalen of the Office of General Counsel, the best possible outcome ensued when she decided to pursue locating her birth mother, and by all measures her birth mother experienced a similarly positive experience when they reunited five decades later.

Adoptees are cautioned that reunions with birth parents oftentimes are fraught with pain and rejection. Many factors and personalities are involved, and they are told that after their initial meeting their relationships often break off.

Sharon was born in 1948 and was adopted by loving parents in West Virginia from an adoption agency in Tennessee. When she was 5 the family moved to Ohio, where she enjoyed a happy childhood and her parents adopted another baby, a little boy named Rick, when Sharon was 14.

Sharon first learned she was adopted at age 12, only after a relative began telling others that Sharon had been adopted. This revelation came as a shock at such a difficult time in life, and it sent her into a rebellious phase during her teenage years.

Sharon later married and had three children and six grandchildren with her first husband, Paul. In her career she holds a responsible position as the contact person handling health department professional services contracts. But some small part of her wanted to find out about the circumstances of her birth and to learn whether there were any living



Mother and daughter exchange their first hugs.

members of her biological family.

Word was that baby brokers operated from Tennessee at the time she was adopted, and she was concerned that there might be no trail left to find her true birth mother.

Then two years ago at age 52 she went online and checked out the Tennessee Web site on adoption records. She called a toll-free number and requested her original birth certificate. At the time she had to send several forms of identification to document her identity, including a copy of the birth certificate created when she was adopted.

*Adoptees.....continued on page 8*

## Alabama Department of Public Health

### Mission

To serve the people of Alabama by assuring conditions in which they can be healthy.

### Value Statement

The purpose of the Alabama Department of Public Health is to provide caring, high quality and professional services for the improvement and protection of the public’s health through disease prevention and the assurance of public health services to resident and transient populations of the state regardless of social circumstances or the ability to pay.

The Department of Public Health works closely with the community to preserve and protect the public’s health and to provide caring quality services.

# ALABAMA’S HEALTH

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Informational materials in alternative formats will be made available upon request..

# Lotus Word Pro tip

**Y**ou can imbed many different types of objects into a Lotus Word Pro document. For example, you can add a table with Lotus 1-2-3 functionality by selecting "Create" from the menu bar. From the drop down menu, select "Object" and a dialog box will pop up. You have the option of creating a new object or an object from a file.

To create a new blank spreadsheet to insert in your document:

- Select "Object" from the dialog box.
- Choose the Object type from the scrolling list. In this case, choose "Lotus 1-2-3 9 Workbook."
- Click on "OK."
- A block containing a small Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet will appear. A limited Lotus 1-2-3 toolbar will also be added to the Word Pro toolbar.
- You can enter data and formulas just as you would in Lotus 1-2-3.
- To re-size or move the object, click on an area outside the spreadsheet. When you click on the spreadsheet again, the 1-2-3 frame will be gone, but you will be able

to manipulate the object.

To re-size the object, align the cursor over a "handle" at the edge of the frame. When you get a double-headed arrow, while holding down the left mouse button, drag the edge in the desired direction. To move the object, align the cursor over the spreadsheet. Click and hold the left mouse button, and drag your mouse in the direction you wish to move your spreadsheet. The "anchor" can be moved in a similar fashion.

To delete the box completely, click on the box and hit the delete key on the keyboard.

- To open the object for editing, double-click on the spreadsheet.

## Retirees

**T**he following employees retired effective April 1.

**John Ashmore** - Bureau of Clinical Laboratories

**Ethel Burton** - Health Statistics

**Suzanne Dickerson** - Health Care Facilities

**J. L. Foster** - Mobile Division Laboratory

**Elizabeth Knight** - Randolph County Health Department

**Jim Welch** - Family Health Services

## ALPHA registration deadline extended

**R**egistration for the Alabama Public Health Association annual education conference at the Mobile Convention Center April 24-25 has been extended until April 17. For more information on the conference visit the ALPHA Web site at [www.alphassoc.org](http://www.alphassoc.org).

For online registration go to [http://www.dawnwright.com/alpha\\_registration1.asp](http://www.dawnwright.com/alpha_registration1.asp) or fax completed form to 251-450-1070. Public health employees who register online must bring a copy of their form signed by their supervisor to registration.

Discounted accommodations for the Adam's Mark Hotel have also been extended to April 17. For hotel reservations call 251-438-4000 or toll-free at 866-749-6069.

# Help/resources are available for sexual assault victims

**S**exual assault is a terrifying and often brutal crime of violence, dominance and aggression. It is defined as any form of forced sexual activity, whether overtly or by inferred threat. It includes rape, attempted rape, incest, sexual harassment, child molestation, marital rape, voyeurism and exposure.

Sexual violence against women is significantly impacting our communities. Every eight minutes a woman is raped or sexually assaulted in the United States, and the crime is most often committed by someone the victim knows. In 2001, according to the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center, 1,337 women reported being raped. Of these cases, 64 percent of the victims knew or were related to the offender. It is estimated that only 16 percent of all rapes are reported.

The Alabama Department of Public Health and the Alabama Coalition Against Rape have combined efforts to raise awareness of sexual assault as a serious public health problem.

“It is imperative that agencies such as the Alabama Department of Public Health inform women that they are not alone and that there is support available,” said Nancy Wright, director, Injury Education, of the Alabama Department of Public Health. “Too often rapes go unreported out of fear and mistrust, resulting in mental and emotional trauma.”

“We are committed to improving the lives of rape victims,” said Beverly Youse, President of the Board of the Coalition. “Our services are available 24 hours a day, seven days per week.”

The Alabama Coalition Against Rape, comprised of 15 member rape crisis centers throughout the state, works in Alabama’s communities to educate and prevent rape, as well as empower crisis centers to facilitate the humane, consistent and compassionate care of victims of sexual violence and their families. Services provided by the centers include:

- 24-hour crisis hotline
- Emergency shelter
- Child advocacy
- Counseling - individual and group
- Court advocacy
- Education and training (community and professional)
- Legal assistance
- Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)
- Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)
- Support groups
- Volunteer program

If you are in a crisis situation help is available. To access a crisis center in your area or for immediate assistance call the Alabama Coalition Against Rape’s 24-hour hotline 1-800-725-RAPE (7273).

## Special award presented



Albert Woolbright, Ph.D., director of the Statistical Analysis Division, Center for Health Statistics, received a special award from the March of Dimes Alabama Chapter at the 2003 State Perinatal Conference. The award was presented for his service to the community and contributions to public health. Shown at left is Robin Allison Collins, State Director of Program Services/Public Affairs for the March of Dimes. She said the purpose of the award is to recognize Dr. Woolbright for his desire to provide the highest quality of perinatal data, his outstanding efforts to support the data needs of the State Perinatal Advisory Council, the March of Dimes and other organizations “and for doing all this with a smile.” Ms. Collins further stated, “Dr. Woolbright’s dedication, professionalism and commitment to the highest standards exemplify what is best in our government and our state.”

# Public health social workers recognized for their contributions during National Social Work Month

Public health social workers were recognized on March 7 for the many efforts they make to improve the quality of health of Alabamians. Special recognition went to Melinda Lewis, Shannon Williams and Angela Ganey.

Dedication, compassion and professionalism are traits common to the three public health social workers recognized as social workers of the year at the Public Health Social Work Seminar at the RSAActivity Center in Montgomery.

Manager of the Year honors went to **Melinda M. Lewis**, Public Health Area V social work manager. Ms. Lewis supervises maternity, teen medically at risk and Plan *first* care coordination for Blount, St. Clair and Shelby counties. A nominator said of Ms. Lewis, “She exhibits great leadership skills and works well with others.” Ms. Lewis chairs the Blount County Relay for Life.

Another supporter said, “Melinda is a credit to our clinic and to all social workers. When she speaks to those around her, you can hear many things in her voice: compassion, respect and sincerity.”

“No matter the circumstance, Melinda finds humor, joy and compassion in all that she does. Whether it’s a staff member who needs help completing billing or filing, a patient who needs transportation or housing, or administration needing a report as soon as possible, Melinda completes the tasks with diligence, professionalism and accuracy. Additionally, she maintains a beautiful spirit regardless of the stress she may be experiencing.”

In another letter of support, she was described as “A wonderful role model” who “leads by her example.”

**Shannon Williams** of the Crenshaw County Health Department was named Public Health Social Worker of the Year for Home Health.

A letter of nomination from a co-worker stated, “I have found her to be dedicated to meeting her clients’ needs. Over the years we have worked together on various environmental issues regarding her E/D Waiver clients. She has consistently helped me to understand and individualize their needs. She helps us to understand and appreciate the social work aspect of those we serve.”

According to a support letter, “Shannon not only knows her patients well, but she also makes the time to know the patient’s extended family. She has a caring attitude toward her clients and treats them with courtesy and respect.”

Furthermore, she “sets a wonderful example of what a social worker should be: caring, informed, resourceful, fair to all of her clients, and most all respected by her peers and the community.”

A nominator from another agency stated, “She truly cares for her patients and their well-being.”

The Public Health Social Worker of the Year for Clinic is **Angela W. Ganey**, public health social worker with the Dale County Health Department who serves as maternity care coordinator.

A letter nominating her praised her enthusiasm for her job and stated, “She treats her clients with respect, courtesy and compassion.” A letter of support added, “Angie is a great morale booster for this department and an asset to the community.”

She has volunteered and has become active in organizations such as the March of Dimes, and took part in a commercial for its Blue Jeans for Babies campaign. She also has been active in the Relay for Life.

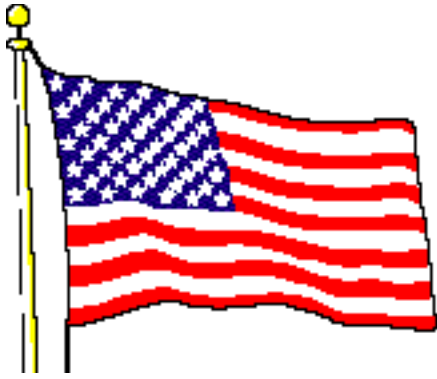
Another letter of recommendation stated of Ms. Ganey, “Compassion, concern, community involvement, devotion, determination, enthusiasm, energetic love for people, positive attitude, professionalism, respect and sincere. These are words that describe our social worker in Dale County.”

Others have described Ms. Ganey as “extremely pleasant,” “thorough,” and “caring.”

This is the twelfth year in which public health social workers have been recognized by the Alabama Department of Public Health during March, National Social Work Month.



Pictured (left to right) are Melinda Lewis, Social Work Manager of the Year; Shannon Williams, Home Health Social Worker of the Year; and Angela Ganey, Clinic Social Worker of the Year.



## Honor Roll of Service Members

Several Alabama Department of Public Health employees and many family members have been called to active military duty. We would like to recognize them and express our gratitude to all of our employees, their spouses, parents and other family members for their sacrifices for our country.

The following information has been submitted to *Alabama's Health*. If you are aware of additional staff or family members, please send their names, their branch of service, your name, work location and telephone number to *Alabama's Health*, Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease, Suite 900, P.O. Box 303017, Montgomery, Ala. 36130-3017, telephone 334-206-5510, e-mail [asheehan@adph.state.al.us](mailto:asheehan@adph.state.al.us) for publication in a future issue.

### Area 1

James Allen, U.S. Navy; Charles Harris; Army Reserve; Tara Harris, Army Reserve; Jerry Harris, Army Reserve cousins of Sonya Windham, administrative support assistant

SSG Robbin Carmichael, Army Reserve, Kuwait, sister of Juliet Smith, WIC clerk, Lauderdale County

IR1 Brian K. Everwein, USS Bunkerhill, Persian Gulf, brother of Kim Noles, administrative support assistant

PVT Chadd Hamm, Army National Guard, nephew of Regina Brewer, home health nurse, Colbert County

Ryan Harris, U.S. Air Force, nephew of Mary Reid, administrative support assistant, Marion County

Albert Hobbs, National Guard, uncle of Mary Fletcher, home health aide, Colbert County

Scott and Todd Hendrix, U.S. Navy, nephews of Lynda Fikes, nurse practitioner

James Hollaran, U.S. Air Force, Valdosta, Ga., nephew of Pamela Hollis, administrative support assistant, Marion County

Christopher Jackson, stepson of Marsha Jackson, Franklin County

Capt. Frank Nichols, U.S. Marine Corp, Okinawa, Japan, brother of Rhonda Nichols, home health aide, Marion County

PFC Bryan W. Phelps, U.S. Army, Ft. Riley, Kan., nephew of Wanda Pepper, administrative support assistant, PHA1 TB Control

Verlon Lee Rackard, U.S. Air Force, Crestview, Fla., son-in-law of Pamela Hollis, administrative support assistant, Marion County

SPC Gregory F. Smith, Army Reserve, Ft. Dix, N.J., husband of Juliet Smith, WIC clerk, Lauderdale County

Sidney Nall, National Guard, brother-in-law of Marilyn Hollingsworth, home health aide, Colbert County

Capt. Bradley S. Rudder, U.S. Army, son of Gisele Rudder, home health supervisor, Colbert County

Pat Waller,

*Service.....continued on page 7*

# Service.....continued from page 6

brother-in-law of Marsha Jackson, Franklin County Private Joseph Weddington, U.S. Army, Fort Benning, Ga., son of Revae Weddington, acting area director of nurses, PHA 1

Tony L. Wooten, husband of Kim Wooten, Clinic Supervisor, Franklin County 877th Engineering, Winfield, Ala.

## Area 5

2nd Lt. Beau Ashley, Army, son of Glenda Ashley, PHA 5

G3 Staff Sgt. Michael J. Brown, Army, brother of Dana Brown, clinic aide

E4 Aimee Lawrence, Army Reserves, daughter of Barbara McSpadden, contract aide, DeKalb County

Julia E. Norberg, National Guard, daughter of Helen Norberg, Etowah County

Lindsay J. Sullivan, U.S. Navy, aboard naval ship Harry S. Truman, daughter of Karen Sullivan, RN, St. Clair County

David Willier, National Guard, son of Barbara Willier, Cherokee County

## Area 6

PVT Kurtis Jermaine Turman, United States Army 109th Transportation Company, 5th Division, Kuwait grandson of Margaret Brown, home attendant, Clay County

## Areas 7 and 9

Joshua St. Onge, son of Dan St. Onge, Immunization Program manager,

## Area 7

\* Janice Robbins, Area VII HIV/AIDS Coordinator

## Area 9

\* Charles Watterson, assistant area administrator, on active duty since 10/01

Laquan Chambers, son of Monica Chambers, clinic aide, Covington County

Trae Gantt son of Glenda Gantt, Monore/Escambia Home Health

Keith D. Gantt, Jr., son of Phyllis Gantt, nutrition associate, Escambia County

Hamilton King, son of Jane King, administrative support assistant, Wilcox County

Michael Sewell, son of Jeanne Sewell, area nursing director and brother of Jamie Manning, CHIP

## Health Promotion and Chronic Disease

\* Major Barry Riddle, public health educator Army National Guard

Sgt Richard G. Olmstead, III, U.S. Marine Corps, brother of Melissa Khan, epidemiologist

## HIV/AIDS Division

\* Capt. Anthony Merriweather, HIV/AIDS Surveillance Director U.S. Army Reserve, Fort Riley, Kan.

## Professional and Support Services

Stephen Jones, 187th Fighter Wing, Alabama Air National Guard husband of Michele Jones, training coordinator

## WIC Division

John Harris, 187th Fighter Wing, Alabama Air National Guard brother of Larry Harris, stock clerk, WIC

\* Health Department Employee

# Premature.....continued from page 1

and morbidity in Alabama. Black mothers are twice as likely to have a premature birth when compared with white mothers and the infant mortality rate for black infants is 15.2 per 1,000 live births.

Goals and objectives for 2003 were stated. These are the fiscal year 2003 goals:

- Reduce maternal, infant and childhood morbidity and mortality in Alabama specifically through facilitation of state, regional and local community collaboration, interest and action regarding health care needs and service.
- Assess the quality and effectiveness of the health care systems for women and infants through the collection, analysis and reporting of data.

Objectives include the following:

- Reduce the infant mortality rate to no more than 9.2 per 1,000 live births
- Reduce the infant mortality rate among blacks to no more than 14.3 per 1,000 live births
- Reduce pregnancies among females aged 15-17 to no more than 40 per 1,000 adolescent females
- Reduce the incidence of low birthweight to no more than 9.3 percent.
- Decrease the percent of women who smoke during pregnancy to 12 percent
- Decrease the percent of adolescents age 10-19 who smoke during pregnancy to 14.8 percent

- Increase to 84 percent the proportion of pregnant women who receive adequate prenatal care in the first trimester, and receive risk-appropriate care, including an opportunity for screening and counseling for fetal abnormalities
- At least 85 percent of babies with birthweights of 500 - 1,499 grams will be born at Perinatal Class A or B hospitals
- Increase the percent of mothers who place their infants on back for sleeping to 90 percent.
- Increase the percent of mothers who breastfeed their infants for one week or longer to 52 percent.

Initiatives influencing perinatal issues include the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, Child Death Review, the Alabama Child Health Insurance Program, Alabama Smoking Cessation-Reduction in Pregnancy Trial, Alabama Tobacco Free Families Program, Alabama Unwed Pregnancy Prevention Program, Alabama Newborn Screening Program, Newborn Hearing Screening, Breastfeeding Promotion, Alabama Abstinence-Only Education Program, Maternity and Family Planning.

For more information contact Gene Hamrick, Perinatal Program Director, Bureau of Family Health Services, The RSA Tower, Suite 1368, P. O. Box 303017, Montgomery, Ala. 36130-3017, (334) 206-5675, e-mail ghamrick@adph.state.al.us.

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She paid a fee of \$150, and the Tennessee officials initiated a search in January 2001. Then in March 2001 she received word that she indeed had records on file. Once they acknowledged a file, she sent a letter requesting copies. She received a large envelope in April by certified mail. But the envelope just sat on the seat in her truck. She couldn't open it until she called her daughter Cheryl on her cell phone to ask that she be with her.

She slowly read three form letters on agency letterhead, which told her about further search possibilities with other agencies, provided support information and offered help in establishing the first contact. She very slowly read the rest of the packet.

Then she found her original birth certificate listing her mother's name, address, city and state of birth. She learned her birth mother was age 21 when she was born, and had two full-term births before her. This knowledge was enough

to absorb for a time.

## Tennessee search begins

Sharon didn't act on the information until Feb. 19, 2003, when she and her second husband Jack drove to Tennessee to conduct a hands-on search for her parentage. She had a copy of the decree and petition for adoption from Tennessee Children's Services, and she called the Chattanooga Bicentennial Library.

A search for the address listed in the 1949 City Directory, found the names of the people residing at the address listed on the birth certificate at the time of Sharon's birth as Harrison and Stella Goins, along with Mrs. Allie Harris. Her mother had been born in Rhea County, Tenn., and she spent from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. in the Clyde W.

*Adoptees.....continued on page 9*



# Adoptees.....continued from page 8



Shown are Don Harris, their mother, Allie (Harris) Smith, Sharon Whalen and Gary Harris.

Roddy Library looking at microfilm from the 1920 and the 1930 census.

Sharon told her husband she was tired, but he encouraged her to go to the town of Graysville, which was the city listed on her birth certificate as her mother's birth place. Graysville had flooded just the day before. They drove there anyway in their SUV, and she got out to have her photograph taken in front of the Graysville City Hall so she would have a memento at least of the town where she was born. There was a sign on the door of City Hall stating that it was closed because of the flooding and that city offices had moved next door at the library.

At that time a man coming from the direction of the library asked, "Can I help you folks?" So Jack replied that his wife would like to see some old school yearbooks in the Library. The man stated that the library was closed because City Hall had to take it over to do its business. The man said the only person over there right now is his wife. Sharon asked if she worked for the library. He said she did not, that she worked for City Hall. Sharon asked if he thought she might know if they had any old school yearbooks in the library. He said he didn't know and Jack asked if it would be okay if my wife talked to your wife.

"Jack encouraged me to go in," Sharon said. "The man's wife was there, but she was talking to an insurance man about the flood insurance. I wanted to leave because I knew I was going to ask her a question she probably didn't know anything about, but Jack was waiting outside and knew I couldn't come out and say I hadn't talked with her. So I stood and waited."

"When she completed her business with the insurance man she turned to me and asked if she could help me,"

Sharon said. "I said probably not, because this is a question about the library and your husband has told me that you do not work in the library. But I asked her if she knew if the library had old yearbooks, and she said, as I knew she would, that she didn't have a clue. She asked me why I needed an old yearbook, if I didn't mind her asking, and I said no I did not mind and told her my story about being on a search for my birth mother.

"She asked what was the name of the person I was looking for, and she telephoned the town's librarian, and asked her if she recognized any of these names: Alice L. Goins or Allie Harris, (There were two different names of two documents. On the birth certificate the name was Alice L. Goins [Harris] and on the adoption papers it was Allie Harris.) She did know an Alice Goins, the lady at City Hall said I think there is someone here you need to talk to you. Sharon was told to call her at her house. The librarian knew an Alice L Goins, that was now a Williams. She gave her Alice's phone number and told her to tell her that Karen Beans had given it to her, but to tell her that she would remember her as Karen Sims.

"My heart was beating fast," Sharon said, when she heard someone who knew Alice Goins and knew some things about her, she returned to the SUV with Alice Goins Williams' phone number in hand. Her husband encouraged her to go ahead and make contact, so she called her on her cell phone.

After a short explanation she found out that this was not her mother, but that this Alice Goins Williams knew her mother Allie Harris. They agreed to meet at the library in Dayton where Sharon had been at most of the day. Mrs. Williams gave her a lot of information and told her that she had just talked to Allie a couple of weeks ago at a funeral. By then it was 8 p.m. and the Whalens had to drive to Alabama to return to work the next day. But she gave Mrs. Williams her name, address, e-mail address and cell phone number and said, "Give it to anyone who wants it." To her amazement, she got a call from a man who said, "This is your brother Gary.," "You're kidding," Ms. Whalen said.

Gary replied, "I knew about you. I found out in 1991 when Mama's sister told Dorlene, (Gary's wife) about you."

"I am so excited you don't even know," she told her long lost brother.

Gary's wife said Gary had just said a couple of months ago that, "I would give anything to find my sister." It's just wonderful, but Mama knows nothing about it," Gary said.

Gary e-mailed Sharon a photo of his mother at age 16,

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and she e-mailed Gary a picture of her at 16. No one could tell one from the other. He said, "You look more like Mama than any of us."

When Gary first spoke to his mother about knowing he had a younger sister and finding her, she was crocheting and didn't skip a stitch until Gary said, "She knows about all of us."

Their mother said, "I want to see her." Gary called Sharon and their mother said, "I've thought about you all the time. Nobody knew about you, and I prayed for you every day. I told people I could never break my promise."

Sharon's mother was divorced and raising two boys when she was born. Times were difficult in 1948, and her working hours had been cut back so she earned only \$10 a week.

"I couldn't even support myself, and I knew I would not be able to give you the life that I wanted you to have," her mother explained. "I thought the best thing I could do was give you to a family with a stable life."

Sharon said, "I understand that."

Her birth mother continued, "It wasn't because I didn't want you." At the time of the adoption, birth mothers agreed they would never contact their offspring put up for adoption.

Sharon explained, "I had good parents with a good upbringing and I did fine. I'm glad that our time has come to meet each other." Her mother said, "This will complete the circle."

## Telling the family

But Sharon's 77-year-old mother had to tell her other children, and she didn't wait long. Sharon was the third of eight children, and all except one had survived. (One brother drowned in a creek at age 10.) Five of Sharon's siblings got together the next night at Allie's home. Their mother insisted that they eat before she told them why she had called them together.

Alice Faye (the youngest) said, "Okay mom, what's this all about?" and their mother told them. She started by saying, "Lucinda (Cindy as she is known by) is not my first daughter." Gary later told Sharon as he explained the night's events, "You could have heard a pin drop."

Sharon's two brothers and mother were the first to meet when they reunited at a cafeteria in Oxford, Ala., on March 2. Sharon had convinced herself she would not cry at what was sure to be an emotional gathering. Her birth mother held her arms out and Sharon said, "I knew it would be emotional. I had decided I would not be a weeping willow, but I started boo hooing as soon as I was in my mother's arms. Both of us were shaking and crying, and when we looked eyeball to eyeball at each other we could see how much alike we looked."

There was not a dry eye in the place. Then all the others hugged and they sat down and talked. "We just kind of blended like we had always known each other, but had been away for a while and we were just catching up on old times. Everyone was just themselves and we're just like each other."

## Larger reunion welcomes newly found relatives

Then on March 22, 55 relatives including her sisters came to meet Sharon and her family, including a niece from Atlanta, cousins from Huntsville, and others from Georgia and Tennessee. Sharon's husband, children, their spouses and grandchildren enjoyed meeting one another. Interestingly, one of Sharon's younger sisters is also named Sharon.

"They wore name badges labeled with their relationship to me," Sharon said. "It was overwhelming. My Aunt Nettie (mother's older sister) even gave me a handmade quilt." She started making it the day they found out about me. She said she wanted to give it to me to welcome me into the family. My brother Gary gave me a photo album with the words "to my beloved sister" on a gold plate on the cover and filled it with family photos that were labeled who was who so I could catch up.

Now that they have become acquainted, this is not all. They are anticipating a huge family reunion on Independence Day where she hopes to meet the remaining brother who lives in California. They are keeping in touch with their newly discovered relatives, as well.

What impact has this had on her birth mother? She said, "It's just like a burden has been lifted. Now it's out and I feel wonderful."

Her mother told them when asked how she felt, "Oh, I'm surprised but not upset. I've carried this around with me so long."

Sharon said, "It's really been good for me. On her birthday I sent her flowers and a card that read, 'God has given me back to you.'"

Her mother replied to her, "God did give you back to me and I thank Him for that. Things opened up so miraculously. On that last day in Graysville when I was ready to go home, God knew it was the right time for this to come about and it couldn't have happened at a better time. God's timing is perfect and we're all real thankful."

Sharon concluded, "This experience with finding my new family has given me a completion in my life that is unexplainable. I know that it will not be that way for everyone, but if you are prepared for the worst, it does not have to end badly even if it doesn't turn out as wonderful as

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# Adoptees.....continued from page 10

mine did. Just having your own information about yourself means a lot.”

## Alabama adoption laws

In 2000 Alabama law was changed to allow adult adoptees to access their sealed, pre-adoption birth certificates without having to first obtain a court order. The Center for Health Statistics maintains nearly 200,000 sealed files.

The August 2000 revision to the vital records law also permits a birth parent to place information in the sealed file of a child who was adopted. Under the new law the birth parents of an adopted child may state their wishes regarding being contacted, and may provide medical history information on the adoptee’s birth family. The vast majority of parents who responded stated they wished to be contacted by the adoptee.

The law allows only the adopted person named on the birth certificate to request a copy of the contents of the sealed file. The person must have been born in Alabama,

must be 19 years of age or older, and must have had an original birth certificate removed from the files due to an adoption, legitimation or paternity determination. A non-refundable \$20 fee is charged for processing requests.

A Request for Pre-Adoption or Other Birth Certificate from an Alabama Sealed File or a Contact Preference Form for Parents of Adopted Children Born in Alabama can be requested by letter addressed to Center for Health Statistics, Vital Records - Adoptions Section, P.O. Box 5625, Montgomery, Ala. 36103-5625.

For additional information call (334) 206-5426. Forms and information may also be obtained through the Alabama Department of Public Health Web site at <http://www.alapubhealth.org> under vital records: <http://204.29.113.114/Chs/adopt.html>.

## Clinic coordinator receives Community Service Award

**O**n Feb. 21 Carol Wilson, clinic coordinator for Autauga County Health Department, was honored by the Prattville Fire Department. Wilson received the Community Service Award because of her willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty in assisting the fire department.

“Carol always works to meet our schedule, not hers. And if that means coming early in the morning she does it,” said David Tucker, chief of training for the Prattville Fire Department.

Wilson has been volunteering for the fire department for five years performing preventive therapy functions such as administering hepatitis vaccinations, tuberculosis skin tests and flu shots.

“I see the work I do with the fire department as part of my duties. Part of my job is to help them be healthy so they can do their job well,” said Wilson.

As the clinic coordinator for the Autauga County Health Department since 1999, Wilson’s regular duties involve overseeing staff, checking appointments and reviewing labs and charts.

“Although I get to see patients through family planning and maternity visits, my job now involves a lot of paperwork. But the reason that I got into nursing was for the patient

contact, which I get to have more of by volunteering with the fire department,” said Wilson.



David Tucker of the Prattville Fire Department presents the Community Service Award to Carol Wilson.



April is Cancer Control Month and National  
STD Awareness Month.

# Calendar of Events



**April 10**

REBROADCAST HIPAA Privacy High Impact, 1:30-4:00 p.m., Alabama Medicaid Agency. For more information contact Video Communications, (334) 206-5618.



**April 11**

West Nile Virus Dead Bird Surveillance in 2003 in Alabama: Testing Birds, Shipping Birds, and Managing Dead Bird Data, 8:30-10 a.m. For more information contact William Johnston, D.V.M., (334) 206-5969.



**April 23**

Bioterrorism in America Today, UAB Grand Rounds, 12 noon -1:30 p.m. For more information contact Mike Maetz, (205) 934-7074.



**April 24**

Alabama Public Health Association. For more information contact Jim McVay, (334) 206-5600.

**April 24-25**

Alabama Public Health Association Educational Conference, Mobile Convention Center. For more information contact Tony Thompson, (251) 479-8379.



**May 1**

CHIP Update, ADPH and Medicaid Agency, 10 a.m.-12 noon. For more information contact Knoxye Williams, (334) 206-2933.

**May 3-9**

National Nurses Week



**May 14**

Caring for Cancer Patients in the Home, Home Health Aide and Home Attendant Continuing Education, 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Janice McIntosh, (334) 347-2664, extension 400.



**June 6**

Enhancing Stroke Treatment Systems, 1-3 p.m. For more information contact Janice Cook, (334) 206-5610.



**June 11**

Documentation Standards and Legal Issues in Women's Health, Public Health Staff Development, 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Annie Vosel, (334) 206-2959.



**June 18**

HIV Risk Assessment for Family Planning, 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Annie Vosel, (334) 206-2959.