

Community News

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Local couple's 'dream' comes true after winning essay contest

By THOMAS DIMOPOULOS

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CLIFTON PARK — When the phone call came, telling her than she and her husband would be receiving free fertility treatments, Naeela Marrero felt like she was dreaming.

"It was August 14 and I was at work. I knew that was when they were going to make the call, so it was on my mind all day," Marrero recalled. "By 2-3 o'clock though, I figured they already made the call to the winner. I just thought, fine, at least we tried."

Marrero and husband Hernan Figueroa had been trying to have children for seven years. They made the decision that if they wanted to start a family, they would have to seek assistance from the medical community. Three months ago the couple packed up their belongings in Puerto Rico and came north to New York.

"Most of my family lives here in the area and we chose Clifton Park specifically for the school district," Marrero said. "This is where we would like our kids to go to school."

A few miles south, the Albany IVF announced a Gifted IVF Essay Program. The winner, chosen from an essay contest describing what parenthood would mean to them would be chosen to receive IVF treatments at no cost.

The center specializes in assisted reproduction and in vitro fertilization (IVF) and was founded by Peter Horvath.

Born in New York City, Horvath first came to the area in 1978 for study at the Albany Medical College. It was a time when the processes of assisted reproduction and in vitro fertilization (IVF) were achieving major success. After completing his studies, he started the first IVF program at Albany Medical College in 1988. A decade later, Horvath began the private practice with his wife, Virginia

"I heard her say, 'Hello, this is Gwen from Albany IVF.' After that she didn't have to say anything. But when she asked, 'Do you know why I'm calling?' I said, 'I think so, but, please, I just want to hear you say it.

Naeela Marrero

Giugliano, a gynecologist.

When the couple decided to start a family of their own, fate would play a quirky role.

"While I had over a decade's experience counseling couples about the importance of embracing alternative paths to family-building early in their infertility care, it was time for me and my wife to experience this advise first-hand," Horvath said. Despite poor odds, there is a happy ending. The couple has two children, Peter Jr., and Emma Adriana, both conceived through technologies in the practice.

"We chose to come to New York so we can work and save money for IVF treatments," Marrero said. She secured a position as a supervisor in an Albany hotel and Figueroa as a mechanic in an area auto dealership. They estimated the cost of treatments between \$10,000

and \$15,000. When Marrero learned of the essay contest, she saw an opportunity.

"I just sat down and started writing," she said. "The heading was: What does parenting mean to you? I just answered how I would want to raise my child basically to be a well-rounded individual. We think we are hard working and responsible people. That is everything I would want our child to be," Marrero said. The afternoon of Aug. 14, she went on with her day at work, although the significance of the day was on her mind. Then the call came that took a journey of seven years and relocation across the continent to hear.

"I heard her say, 'Hello, this is Gwen from Albany IVF.' After that she didn't have to say anything," said Marrero, "but when she asked, 'Do you know why I'm calling?' I said, 'I think so, but, please, I just want to hear

you say it.' My husband and I were in disbelief and very emotional when we received the news," Marrero said. Marrero and Figueroa are one of three couples chosen to receive IVF treatments at no cost. Amy and Stephen Hughes of Averill Park and Brenda and Dan Fairbanks of Hudson Falls are the others.

"We're extremely excited to give these deserving couples hope and promise to start families of their own," Horvath said. Recipients of the first program in 2003 were Brenda and Steve Hathaway. After trying unsuccessfully to have children for five years, the couple are parents to twins born in August 2004.

"This is better than winning the lottery," Marrero said. "If you won the lottery, you would

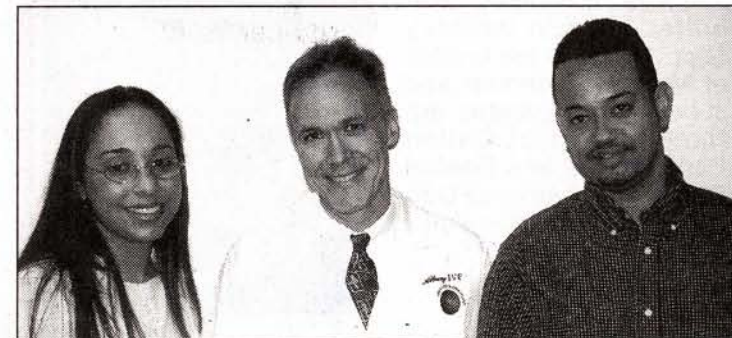


Photo provided

From left: Naeela Marrero, Dr. Peter Horvath and Hernan Figueroa. Marrero and her husband Figueroa will receive free IVF treatments from Albany IVF, which is run by Horvath. The couple won the medical procedure in an essay contest.

go out and buy things. This takes off the financial burden and in the end, I have my child which will always be a reminder of the great gift that Dr. Horvath has given us," she said.

The procedure is underway and by December the couple will know if they were successful. "You are welcome to call me back then and see how we did," Marrero said hopefully.