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# Central Florida LIFESTYLE

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# Little Faybree Fights the Odds

By Matt Bendell  
Photo by Phyllis Gray

When **Andy** and **Nicole Neufeld** welcomed little **Faybree Jane** into the world, they did not know the challenges she would face during her first year of life.

**S**trength and character are often perfected in trying times. For one East Orlando couple, this truth was experienced firsthand through the birth of their child.

**Andy** and **Nicole Neufeld**, were thrilled when they learned they were going to become parents. On January 14, 2008, they welcomed **Faybree Jane** into the world, and, at first, she seemed to be the healthy daughter they were hoping for. They expected a change in their lives, as any first-time parents would, but they never could have anticipated the extent to which Faybree's health challenges would alter the course of their lives.

Several weeks later, during a routine checkup, a pediatric nurse noticed that Faybree seemed to have low oxygen levels and ordered testing. After a month-long stay at Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children in downtown Orlando, Faybree was

After their infant daughter Faybree had a double lung transplant in April, Andy and Nicole Neufeld learned how lucky they were to have each other's support and hope to start a foundation for parents dealing with major health emergencies.





diagnosed with surfactant deficiency disorder, also known as ABCA3 because medical research has shown that the deficiency in surfactant (a lipid-rich layer that coats air passages and is vital for lung function) is caused by a genetic mutation in the ABCA3 gene. It is a rare lung disease for which there is no definitive cure.

### Against the Odds

The Neufelds are no strangers to unexpected odds. Currently working in new home sales, Andy was once drafted to play Major League Baseball. Mathematically speaking, the odds of that are 837 to one. And after more than a year of trying to conceive a child, Andy and Nicole were blessed with the arrival of Faybree.

However, the odds regarding Faybree's diagnosis were a whole different ballgame. Her illness, a very rare genetic mutation,

has a low chance of occurrence. For Andy and Nicole, the odds of their child having ABCA3 were less than 1 percent. "When something like this happens, it changes your whole life in a matter of seconds," says Andy. "Since learning of Faybree's disease, our lives have gone through radical changes."

Doctors determined that Faybree's only hope for recovery existed in a double lung transplant. After choosing the St. Louis Children's hospital to provide care, Faybree and Nicole were transported to Missouri where Faybree's breathing was constantly monitored. The couple decided that Nicole, an interior designer, would give up her job in Winter Park and move to an apartment near the hospital while Andy would continue working in Orlando and commute to St. Louis every few weeks.

"You never know how strong you really are until you are confronted with a situation like this," says Andy. "At first, you kind of just go into shock, and you don't know exactly what to do. Then, you have to come up

with a plan of action." Andy says Nicole has not left Faybree's side in the last six months. "Naturally, as a parent, you want to do everything in your power to give your child the best quality of life possible."

### The Transplant Option

Andy and Nicole say that Faybree's situation was unique because she didn't have any immediate ABCA3 symptoms after birth. During the months of testing, it was often difficult to decide whether a double lung transplant was the best option. "Faybree was placed on the lung transplant list on March 14," says Nicole. "Her oxygen levels seemed to fluctuate after we arrived in St. Louis. She remained stable but didn't seem to make any forward progress."

More than a month after being placed on the transplant list, Faybree received a double lung transplant on April 26. "Faybree is a

*"Faybree is a fighter. I've seen firsthand how strong she is."*

fighter," says Nicole. "She will need a lifetime of follow-up care, but I've seen firsthand how strong she is and her ability to overcome."

Having a transplant at such a young age actually has its benefits. "Infants have less of a chance to reject their new organs," says Andy. "The risk mainly lies in possible infection after the surgery."

Andy and Nicole say the chances of Faybree's continued recovery are nominal, but they have faith she will keep beating the odds. "The doctors told us that the chance of survival to age 1 is 80 percent, 65 percent to age 5 and 20 percent to age 10."

Andy and Nicole hope to start a foundation for families and single mothers dealing with major health crises. "During Faybree's hospital stay, we saw several single mothers going through similar situations as us," says Andy. "Fortunately, we have the support of our families to see us through. However, that's not the case for many, and, as a result, they're put in tough financial situations." ■



Visit our Web site to find out how to check on Faybree's health at [www.CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com](http://www.CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com).

# CHANGE THROUGH the PTA

Story & Photo by Matt Bendell

**Matt Andraski** joined the Moss Park PTA to get involved in his children's school and our community.

PTA president Matt Andraski wants to be part of the solution at Moss Park Elementary, home of the Eagles.

**B**alancing a fulfilling family life while overseeing vital career obligations can prove to be a challenge. For **Matt Andraski** of Lake Nona, managing both can be hectic at times, but he still dedicates a portion of his time to giving back to the community through his local Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

Working as a specialty pharmaceutical sales representative with Merck, Andraski and his family relocated to Central Florida from Wisconsin three years ago. His wife **Debbie** is a kindergarten teacher, and they have two children, a daughter, **Ashley**, in third grade and a son, **Jackson**, in first grade.

Last year, Andraski chose to become involved with the PTA at his children's school, Moss Park Elementary. As a parent, he says, it's important to be involved in his children's education. "I volunteered at some of the PTA events, and I noticed that everyone was quick to offer up criticism and suggestions on how things could be done differently or better," he says. "I found myself falling into this same trap."

He says his wife encouraged him to become involved with the PTA on a deeper level. "I decided that I needed to be part of the solution and not just offering up suggestions," Andraski says. "I wanted

to be in a role to make things better, so I offered up my help without knowing what I was getting into."

After taking over as president in July 2008, Andraski says he sees the importance of encouraging others to contribute to positive changes in the school. His duties include managing PTA general operations. "I oversee fundraising committees, membership enrollment, community service and ensuring placement of educational opportunities for our children," he says. "When we work together, a lot can be done, and I've encouraged people to step forward because we all play an important role in making change happen," says Andraski.

Through his involvement as PTA president, Andraski says he's seen others develop a renewed sense of ownership in the school and in their children's education. He says, "This makes me happy because I know I'm doing the job that I volunteered to do."

Apart from his volunteer work with the PTA, Andraski says there are several other issues that hit close to home. His

8-year-old daughter suffers from type I diabetes, and, as an encouragement to her, the family has become involved with both the American Diabetes Association and the Juveniles Diabetes Research Foundation. "She is the true champion of our family, and when I see the level of responsibility she has taken on with her own health and dealing with insulin dependency, I realize that I can take on anything," Andraski says.

He also volunteers with the American Cancer Society. "I lost my stepdad to cancer, and my wife lost her father to cancer, so this is a true passion for both of us."

In his free time, Andraski says he appreciates the benefits that Central Florida has to offer, visiting area beaches with his family. They also enjoy biking, water sports and football. "I enjoy golf, and relocating to Florida has been great for my golf game," he says. "This was the main reason I was inspired to start the First Annual Moss Park PTA Golf Challenge, which took place in September." ■



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