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**Health**

## Hyperbaric centre opened in Pincourt

### *Mother of twins with cerebral palsy wants to offer hope to other families*

*By Pailine Naidoo*

The Town of Pincourt might seem an unlikely place for a hyperbaric, oxygen therapy centre to be opened. The reason why that location was chosen becomes clear, however, when one learns that Claudine Lanoix is behind the Island Hyperbaric Center, officially opened last Wednesday (1 December 04).

The mother of five, Lanoix has twins who were born with cerebral palsy. Mathieu and Michel have benefited greatly from the oxygen therapy treatment. However, it was not easy to get. The treatment is not available on medicare and the institutions which have a hyperbaric machine do not use it for that purpose.

In fact, in 1998, when the twins were four years old Lanoix took them to a non-profit centre in England for the treatment. It made a huge difference, she said. Mathieu is a spastic dyplegic-his lower body is affected. He was only able to walk with the help of a walker, and then only for short distances inside the house. Michel is a spastic quadraplegic-his entire body is affected. He could not sit up on his own or use his arms or feed himself. His hands were always clenched.

Following the treatment in England, Mathieu is now able to walk without assistance. Michel was able to open his hands without assistance. (They used to have to pry each finger open and they would close within 30-45 secs). "After treatment in England, his hands began to open, almost like a flower," said Lanoix. Her voice still reflecting the joy she felt at the time, she added, "He sat for the very first time. It was enormous."

It was a milestone she finally write done in the Baby Book!. After only being able to say a couple of words, Michel was also able to speak. "An explosion of vocabulary came out," she said "It was so incredible."

The twins were able to continue treatment in Montreal when the McGill University started a study on using the hyperbaric chamber to help those affected with cerebral palsy.. The results were good but the University was unable to continue to offer the treatment once the study was completed. The College of Physicians would not allow it. It continues to be a controversial alternative approach to neurological problems, despite studies showing the (statistically significant) positive benefits.

There are other remedies, such as botox muscle injections and surgery, but Lanoix wanted something less radical. The hyperbaric chamber is 100% oxygen. Room air has 21 percent. The therapy exposes a patient to pure oxygen at increased atmospheric pressure in a sealed chamber. According to Lanoix, the earlier the treatment is started the better. Until this new centre, the closest one was in Longueuil. "I had to find a way to share this (benefit) with others," Lanoix said.





Hyperbaric chambers in medical institutions are not used for neurological problems. They are used for injured athletes,

burn victims, for severe infections, carbon monoxide poisoning and for deep sea divers. In fact, very few physicians know about hyperbaric chamber treatment, unless they are a scuba diver, Lanoix said. "It is not taught in medical school." Lanoix herself is a certified hyperbaric technician.

The treatment has benefits for a wide range of problems, she noted: cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and strokes as well as

infection. It can slow the progress of diseases like necrotizing fasciitis (flesh eating disease). Had Lucien Bouchard (who lost

his left leg to the disease) been given the treatment, she said, the outcome might have been different. The bacteria can't live in such a high oxygen environment. "It saves lives," she stressed.

Lanoix has been involved in setting hyperbaric centers in several places, one in Coquitlam, B.C. one in the U.S. (a mobile unit in the Mid-west), and one in Longueuil three years ago. Now Lanoix has one in her home town.

The treatment has been used for a variety of problems. It has been used to help children with Down's Syndrome, autistic children, people with osteomyelitis, fibromyalgia and radiation tissue damage. It can help those with visual or hearing problems linked to the cortex. It increases mobility and the range of motion and can even increase cognition. It also boosts the immune system, Lanoix added.

The centre receives no government funding and it is not covered by medicare or (provincial) insurance, so there is a cost. The initial treatment consist of 40 sessions, done every day for five days a week. The cost is \$120 per session ( a total of \$4,800.00). It can also be used by athletes for injury but Lanoix cautions it is not worth it for the average athlete. The chamberis used mainly by high level athletes who need to recover quickly from an injury for an upcoming competition. That requires a 90 minute treatment.

The centre is open five days a week but can, by special arrangement organize Saturday or evening appointments. The centre is trying to be flexible, Lanoix stressed "I know it is taking away from work and family," she said. "As a parent I have lived that." When Claudine Lanoix tried the hyperbaric treatment for her twins six years ago, she had no guarantee the oxygen treatment would work. She was assured that, at least, it would not harm them. "I was comfortable with that," she said. "I would know I had tried my best." The outcome was beyond her expectations. "It worked very well" She would like to offer the same hope to other families so that they don't have to travel for miles to get help as she once did.

To find out more about the Centre Hyperbare de L'île/ Island Hyperbaric Centre call toll free 866-677-7978 or 514-453-7978.

