



Every baby's first birthday is an extra-special occasion. Likewise, the **Wayne County Babies Program's** first birthday celebration was just as memorable.

The event, held at the Wayne County Department of Public Health in Wayne, recognized the first graduating class of eight successful participants – mothers *and* their babies – of this community health initiative. These VIPs were awarded certificates of recognition and treated to a buffet lunch, birthday cake, relaxing massages, and were otherwise showered with lots of attention.

The outreach program, which began in 2005, focuses on reducing infant mortality in Wayne County by supporting mothers and their families during their pregnancies and throughout the babies' first year of life. Among those attending the celebration were: Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano; Health and Human Services Director Edith Killins, and Public Health Director/Officer Loretta V. Davis.

"The Wayne County Babies Program provides help before birth and through a child's first birthday for at-risk mothers and babies," said Davis. "Mothers are provided with prenatal and postpartum education through a caregiver to support healthy, positive outcomes."

She said that improving the health of mothers and children throughout Wayne County is a key component of the Public Health Department's mission. "Children are our future and we can look forward to a brighter one due to programs like this," Davis said.

Killins added: "We want Wayne County to be a place where people can visit, live and play. The Public Health Department is dedicated to making our community just such a place."

Infant mortality – in Wayne County, as in many urban areas – is an ongoing concern. Elaine Bradley, Program Coordinator, said the Wayne County Babies Program is designed "to make a positive difference."

The free home visiting program offers a variety of services to eligible Wayne County mothers and families, including:

- Educational programs and classes that provide information on pregnancy, birth and parenting, including safe sleep practices and enhanced parenting skills and knowledge.

- Transportation to and from the doctor to assist families with access to health care services.
- Family planning services.
- Consultation and support, including parenting health, wellness and proper nutritional needs.
- Community resource connections.

Dearborn resident Zianab Berro and one-year-old son, Zayn Al Abi-din Alzein, were among the program honorees. A mother of three with two older daughters, Berro said, "There were things I learned from the program that were new that I didn't learn with my other children," adding, "the staff is wonderful and very kind; I had fun."

Mothers and babies are assigned individual care workers like Gwendolyn Traylor, who meet with them throughout the year. Traylor served as community health worker for Westland resident Stacey Bullock, who received the distinguished "*First Mom's Award*" as the program's *very first* graduate.

Linda Ward, community health worker for Dearborn resident Linda Fakhouri and daughter Natalia, said the mothers looked forward to the health workers' visits. "If I couldn't make an appointment for some scheduling reason, my client was always calling me to ask when I could come."

The care worker/client relationship is an important reason behind the program's success, agreed Westland mother Ann Morrison. She attended the event with year-old son, Warren and his five-year-old sister, Khailey.

The program has enrolled 142 families to date and has a waiting list. It also has received support from numerous community stakeholders. There are plans of expanding the program in the future.

Reflecting on the program's success, Wayne County Executive Ficano called Wayne County Babies a "milestone and a tribute to babies and mothers."

"Wayne County should be a place for our children's children," he said. "The Wayne County Babies Program helps create an environment for success and improves the quality of life for Wayne County residents."

For more information about the Wayne County Babies Program, contact the Wayne County Department of Public Health at 313-537-1708.