

Festival to Benefit Children's Hospice

Tickets are available for "Savor the South: A Southern Food Festival," to be held on Sat., June 14, from noon to 5 p.m., in the green area next to MacArthur Center (at the corner of Freemason and Monticello). This event will raise money for EDMARC Hospice for Children, an organization that provides 24/7 medical care, counseling and home care to gravely ill children on the Southside and the Peninsula. Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$5 for children ages five through 12. For more information or to purchase tickets, contact EDMARC Hospice for Children at 967-9251.

Chesapeake Regional to Offer Nursing Program

This summer, Chesapeake Regional Medical Center will host an externship program for nursing students who are enrolled in either an accredited associate's degree or bachelor's degree program. Those selected to participate will spend 10 weeks rotating through various units within their nursing interest areas at CRMC. For more information and to request an application, call (757) 312-6566.

Groundbreaking Planned for Sentara Princess Anne

Sentara Healthcare plans to break ground this year for a new 120-bed facility—Sentara Princess Anne Hospital—in southern Virginia Beach. The opening is set for late summer 2011.

Sentara Adopts SPY Technology for Coronary Bypass Surgeries

This year Sentara Heart Hospital and Sentara Virginia Beach General Hospital have implemented the SPY Intra-operative Imaging System—a new technology used before and after coronary bypass surgery to reduce post-surgical complications.

Rehab Wing Now Open at Sentara Hospital in Virginia Beach

Sentara Virginia Beach General Hospital has opened the area's first inpatient rehab facility. The eight-bed unit is run by physicians and staff who care for patients recovering from trauma, stroke, spinal injuries, burns, amputations, hip fractures, neurological disorders and other conditions that limit independence. Services offered include medical care and nursing; physical, occupational, recreational and speech therapy; psychological and social services; support groups and patient and family education.

Former ER Doctor Turns Up the Heat and Gets

BAKING

Feeding a child with food allergies can be a challenge—learn how a mother's search for safe but tasty treats turned out sweeter than she ever imagined.

WRITTEN BY BRENDA H. WELCH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN M. FREER

While children tend to be wary of doctors, the kids attending preschool at Ghent United Methodist Church in Norfolk fidget with excitement at the prospect of seeing Dr. Lucy Gibney. The secret to "Dr. Lucy's" popularity isn't a warm stethoscope or painless shots—it's her cookies.

Gibney, whose four-year-old son, Colin, attends the school, frequently provides cookies and other snacks for Colin and his classmates. But Gibney doesn't mix and bake the treats at home in her kitchen—she brings them straight from her nearby cookie factory.

Four years ago while working as an emergency room (ER) physician at Sentara CarePlex Hospital in Hampton, Gibney never imagined she would one day trade in her doctor's coat and prescription pad for a chef's apron and six ovens. "I knew that when Colin was born, life as we knew it would change," Gibney says. "But I didn't anticipate it would involve owning and operating a cookie factory."

The 2,500-square-foot factory located off Tidewater Drive in Norfolk is unique in that it is free of ingredients such as wheat, gluten, dairy, milk, casein (a milk protein), butter, eggs, peanuts and tree nuts—a decision Gibney made not as a matter of principle but one born of love and necessity.

A frightening diagnosis

The impetus for Gibney's career change came when Colin was just four months old. Still breastfeeding him at that time, Gibney decided to introduce a dairy-based formula into Colin's diet. When Colin's face became red and swollen and his breathing labored, Lucy and her husband, Paul, also an ER physician, recognized that Colin was experiencing a life-threatening anaphylactic reaction to the formula. They gave him infant Benadryl before rushing him to the emergency room. Colin survived, but the Gibneys remained paralyzed with fear.

"Even with our medical backgrounds, we were confused and scared," says Paul. "Colin came very close to dying, and we needed answers."

After a battery of tests, the Gibneys learned that Colin had developed severe food allergies, which occur when



Drs. Lucy and Paul Gibney, founders of Dr. Lucy's, LLC

the body's immune system determines that a certain food ingested is harmful and in turn creates antibodies to attack it. The next time the food is eaten, the immune system releases a wave of chemicals meant to protect the body, but instead they cause allergic reactions that can affect the respiratory and cardiovascular systems, the skin and the gastrointestinal tract. Symptoms can appear within minutes or as long as two hours after the person has eaten the allergenic food.

Dr. Angela Hogan, a pediatrician specializing in allergies at Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters (CHKD) in Norfolk, has treated Colin for the past four years; she says one of the most important items all new parents should have readily available is a liquid anti-histamine (such as Benadryl for infants), as food allergies can emerge at any time. "Benadryl helps decrease symptoms during an allergic reaction, which can buy parents precious time if they need to get their child to the emergency room," Hogan advises.

Like Colin, some children may experience anaphylaxis—a serious allergic reaction that happens instantly and can be fatal. Certain foods and medications as well as bee stings and exposure to latex can trigger this response in a person with such allergies, and administering epinephrine (adrenaline) immediately is crucial. Says Hogan: "If a parent suspects that their child is having a reaction, they should immediately call their pediatrician; if it is severe and the child's breathing is impaired, they should call 911."

Ninety percent of all food allergies involve eight foods: milk, eggs, wheat, soy, peanuts, tree nuts, shellfish and fish.

In Colin's case, dairy, eggs, wheat, peanuts, tree nuts and crab proved to be the dangerous triggers that, if ingested or even touched, could cause him to have an anaphylactic reaction. Because of this, Lucy and Paul stripped their cupboards and refrigerator bare, disinfected every surface, and then faced the task of restocking their home with food.

"I spent hours in the grocery store almost in tears trying to decipher the wording on the food labels to figure out what was safe to bring in our house," Gibney remembers. "I realized that if I made a mistake or misread something, our son could die. The weight of that was enormous."

Hogan says the Gibneys are not alone in feeling overwhelmed by the task of feeding a child who has food allergies: "Society has been slow to realize the prevalence and seriousness of this epidemic, which means restaurants and the food industry haven't been paying attention either."

Michelle Hoang of Suffolk has two children under the age of five who have food allergies and are also under Hogan's care. Hoang says she is all too familiar with feeling confused and crippled with fear when deciding what to feed her children at home as well as in public. "In restaurants, parents of children with food allergies are not being 'picky' when they ask questions," she says. "It literally can be a matter of life or death."

All too common

In 2007, Hoang—with encouragement from Dr. Hogan as well as guidance from the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN)—started a food allergy support group for Hampton Roads families called the Food Allergy Support Group of Tidewater, or FASGOT. Fifteen parents attended the group's first meeting last October, and the circle has since grown to include 47 families. "Parents experience a lot of stress, anxiety and isolation when their child has food allergies," Hoang says. "Some of the more important goals of the group are to support parents, raise awareness and provide a safer environment for our kids." According to the FAAN Web site, food allergies are a growing public health concern in the United States. More than 12 million Americans have food allergies, with the incidence highest among young children—approximately 2.2 million children are afflicted, and one in 17 among those is under age three. And for reasons not fully understood, the number of children with food allergies has doubled over the last 10 years.

Ninety percent of all food allergies involve eight foods: milk and other dairy products, eggs, wheat, soy, peanuts, tree nuts (e.g., almonds, cashews, pecans, pistachios, walnuts), shellfish (e.g., shrimp, crab, lobster) and fish (e.g., tuna, salmon, catfish). Most children outgrow their food allergies, although allergies to peanuts, nuts, fish, and shellfish often linger for life.

The Gibneys learned about FASGOT through Dr. Hogan and immediately joined the group. In talking with other parents in similar situations, Lucy and Paul realized that Colin's severe food allergies could alienate him from his peers during snack time at school and at birthday parties. Lucy Gibney recalls how she scoured grocery store aisles in search of any treat he could eat on such occasions, but she was unable to find even a simple cookie that tasted close to the "real" thing. "All I could find were rock-hard cookies that had no taste whatsoever," she remembers.

Finally, a cookie that passed the test

So she began baking cookies herself, consulting countless vegan and gluten-free cookbooks and downloading recipes off the Internet, only to be disappointed time after time with the result. Gibney's frustrations led her back to tried-and-true family recipes that had been used for generations. From these recipes she pieced together the makings of a cookie that not only pleased Colin, but prompted Paul to offhandedly remark, "These are so good, you should start a business!"

And that is exactly what she did. After a year of research and education, Dr. Lucy made her cookies available to the masses through her Web site, www.drLucys.com, and at stores throughout Hampton Roads and Richmond, including all Farm Fresh locations. Her production team includes Larisa Jachman, a registered nurse who happened to be an avid baker with a culinary degree from Johnson and Wales; Jachman's husband, Troy Swiger, who conducts the company's lab testing and oversees technology; Susan Franklin, who manages the production area; and seven part-time employees who assist in cookie production and packaging.

With help from Paul Gibney, the team developed a quality control program involving three main practices: buying ingredients from carefully selected producers, testing those ingredients for allergen proteins upon arrival, and banning wheat, gluten, milk, eggs, peanuts and tree nuts from the bakery, thereby removing the chance of cross-contamination. The packaging clearly lists ingredients that are and are *not* in the cookies to avoid parental confusion, and each cookie sold is vegan-certified and "kosher pareve," meaning the product neither contains nor has come into contact with meat or dairy products.

Says Gibney: "I want children with food allergies to have delicious treats to eat and share with their friends, but more than that, I want to impact the food industry as a whole."

"Food allergies are very real, very serious, and very common," she adds. "The food industry has to respond to this, and it needs to be done under rigorous quality standards to ensure the safety of our children."

Today Colin is thriving at his preschool and is a healthy, well-adjusted four-year-old with friends who view him as just one of the crowd. "Parents of children with food allergies need to know that although it is scary, they are not alone," Gibney says. "They need to get as educated on the issue as possible, reach out to medical professionals and the community for help, and create a lifestyle that is safe wherein their children can thrive."

As the Gibneys have shown, with a little innovation and a lot of hard work, life for a family dealing with food allergies can end up sweeter and more delicious than they ever thought possible. ■

The number of children with food allergies has doubled over the last 10 years.



Gibney shares the kitchen with head baker Larisa Jachman, a registered nurse who still works full-time hours at Sentara CarePlex Hospital.

More information on food allergies can be found at www.foodallergy.org.

Brenda Welch is the assistant editor for the Hampton Roads Health Journal—Southside Edition, and lives in Chesapeake with her husband and three-year-old son. Send your story ideas, questions or comments to brenda@williamsburghealth.com.