

The Impact of NICU Graduate Reunions

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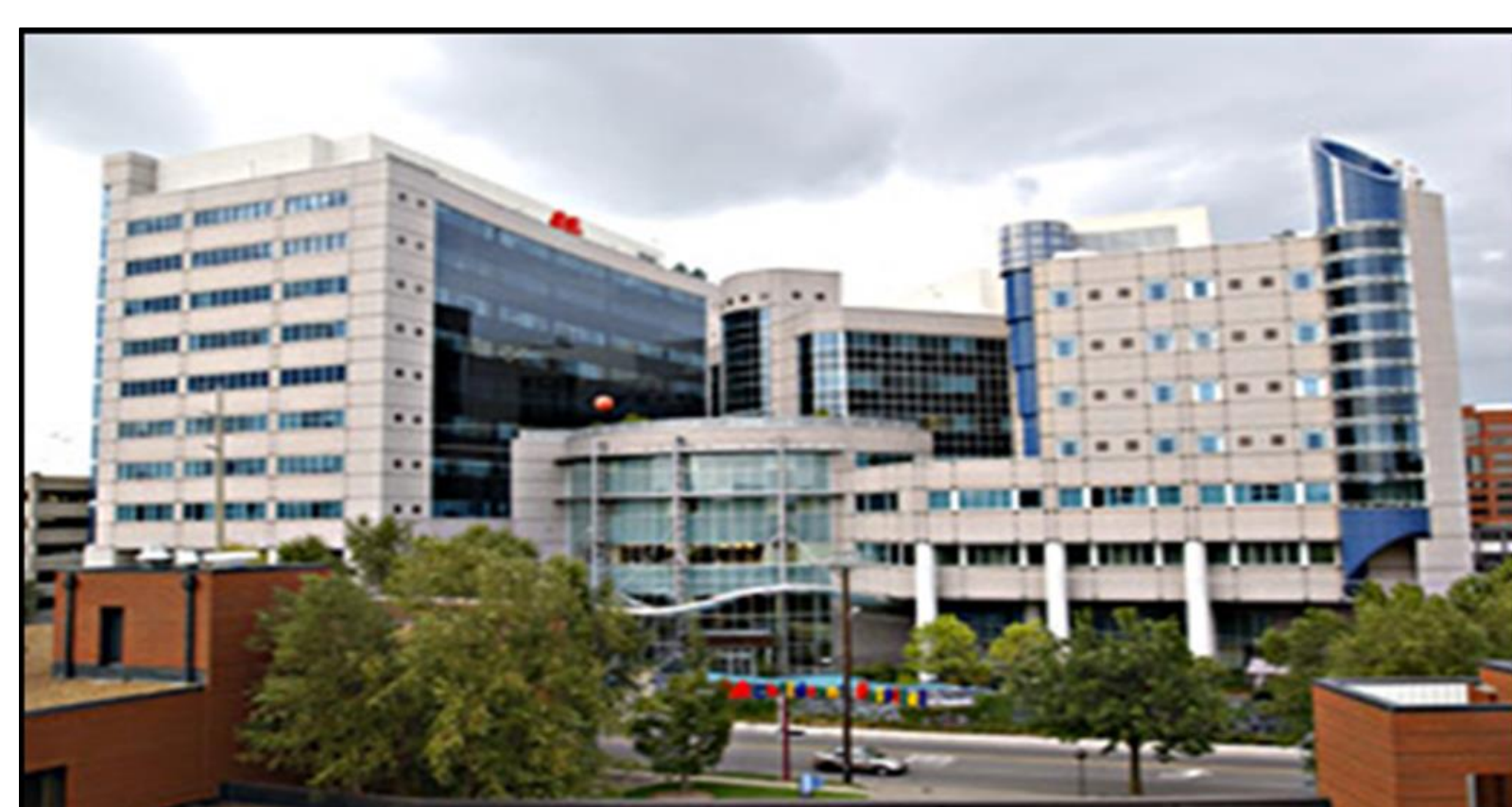
BACKGROUND

- Every year nearly 15 percent of babies born in the United States (close to a half million) are admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for a variety of health conditions. The most common reason is prematurity (born before 37 weeks gestation). NICU admissions also include birth defects, breathing difficulties, and infections, among other factors.
- Admission to the NICU is often unexpected and may occur after a traumatic birth experience. The length of NICU hospitalizations vary from a few hours to many months.
- Other families may not understand the experience of having an infant in the NICU – the feelings of isolation, fear, and powerlessness.
- Hosting a NICU graduate reunion provides an opportunity for former NICU patients and their families to reconnect with healthcare team members and other NICU families.



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL CENTER

Vanderbilt University Medical Center is a Magnet designated, regional medical center in Middle Tennessee that is comprised of four free-standing hospitals, over 70 outpatient clinics, and medical and nursing schools.



Monroe Carell Jr.
Children's Hospital
at Vanderbilt

The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt consists of 96 beds, offering Level IV care to critically ill infants.

- Freestanding children's hospital
 - 78 Private rooms (22 with rooming-in accommodations)
- Unit within adult hospital
 - Open bay (20 bed spaces)
- Inborn / Outborn
 - 1,600 admissions annually (50% surgical)
- Average Daily Census = 87



AIMS

To determine the impact of a NICU reunion on families and neonatal healthcare providers in a Level IV NICU.

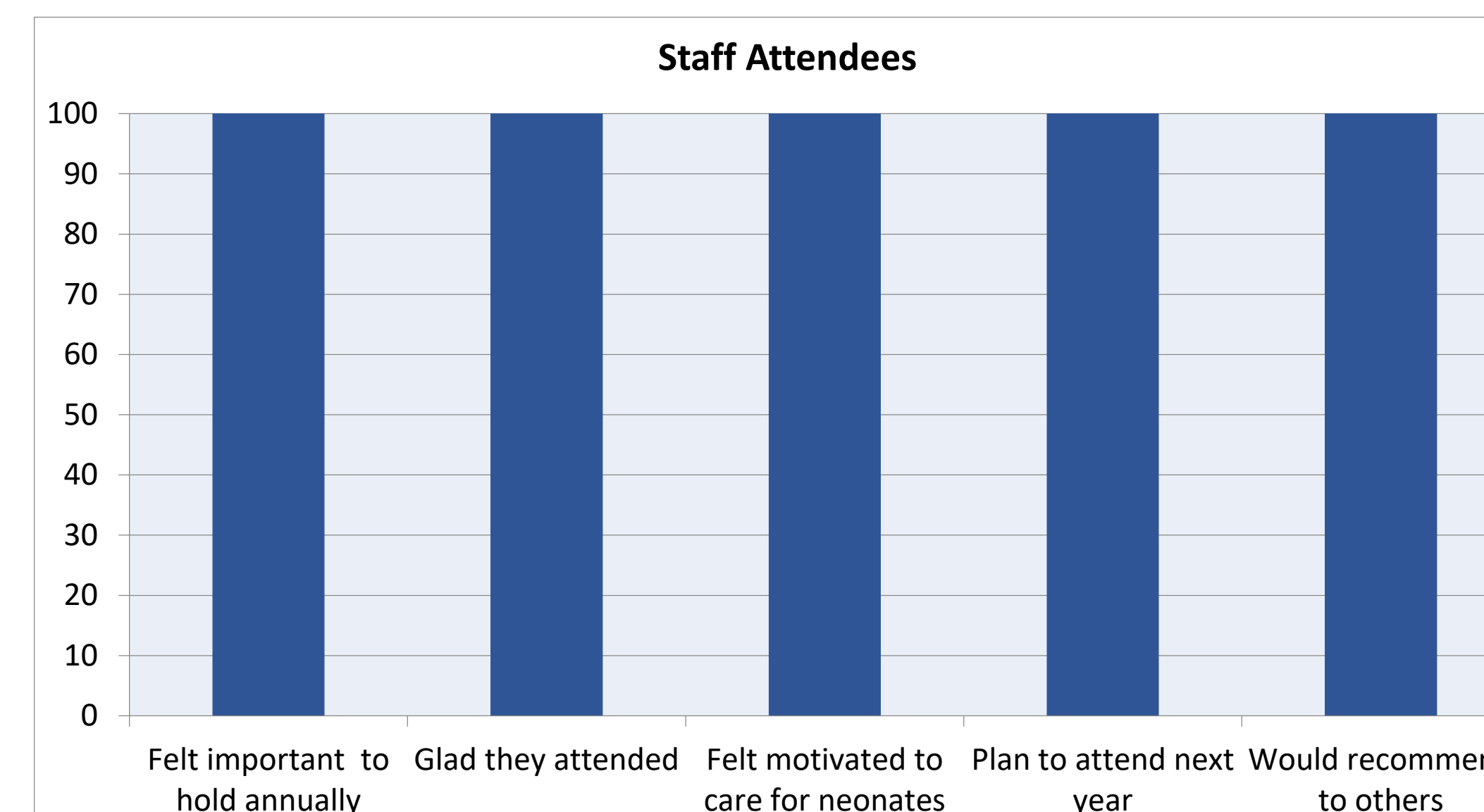
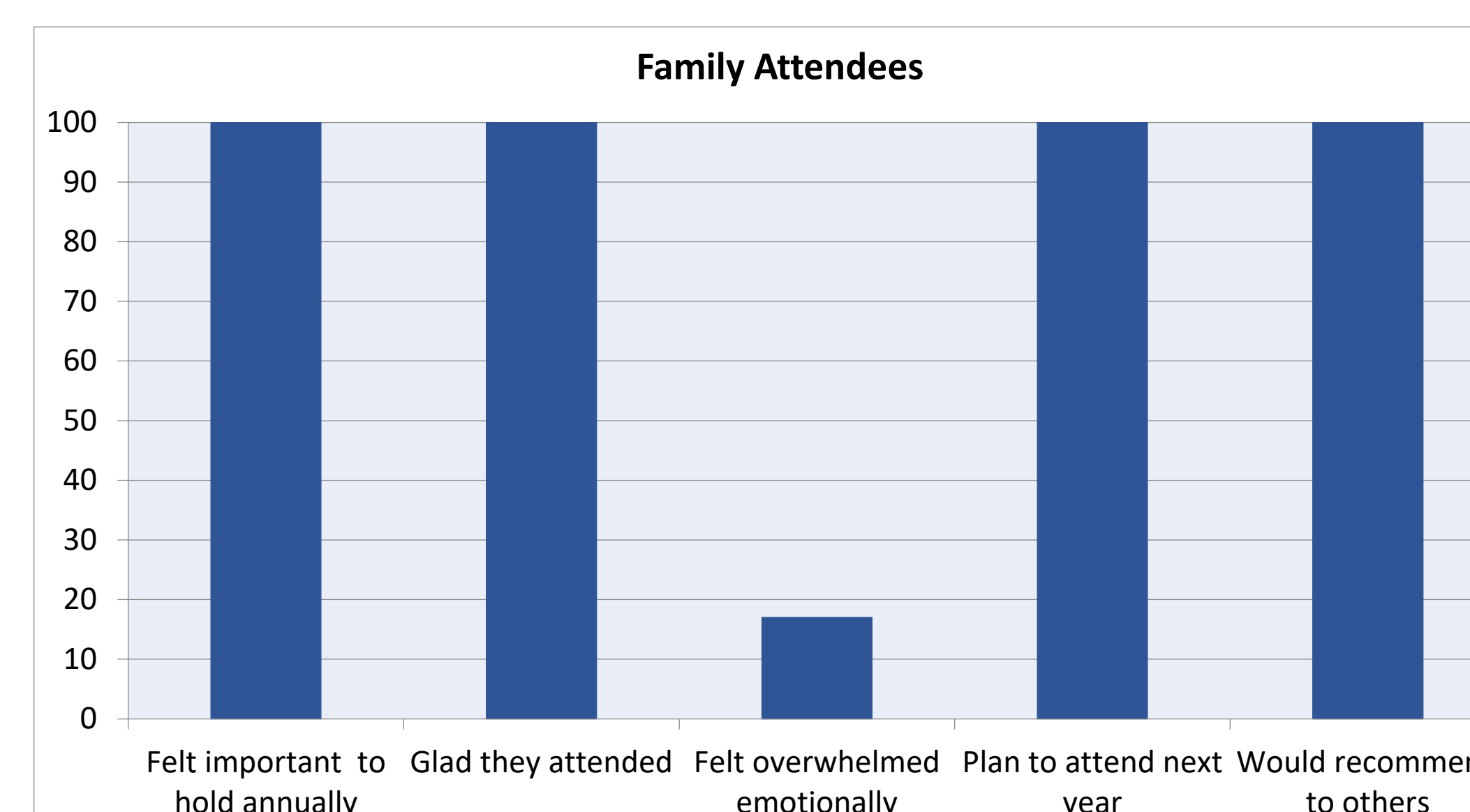


METHODS

- Team huddle to decide to implement NICU reunion
- Evaluated staff interest in participating in reunion
- Recruited volunteers for Reunion Committee
 - Planning
 - Set up
 - Attend / work stations
 - Clean-up
- Theme selected – “Once Upon A Time”
- Invited families of NICU graduates discharged within prior 2 years through postcard invitation
- Advertised the reunion through the hospital social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
- Posted Save-the-Date flyers within the unit for families nearing discharge
- Developed informational website with reservation form
- On the reservation form families encouraged to share:
 - “then” and “now” photos of their NICU graduate for a slideshow
 - Names of healthcare providers they would like to reunite with
- Activities at the reunion:
 - Family photo booth with props
 - Carnival games with prizes
 - Face paint
 - Story nook
 - Crown craft activity
 - Ambulance tours
 - Quiet zone, including sensory activities and calming music
 - Refreshments: pizza, animal crackers, pretzels, popcorn, cake, cupcakes, water bottles
 - Educational table about community support from Parents Reaching Out / Family Voices

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- NICU Reunion held on September 15, 2019
 - Neonatal Nurses Day
- 212 registered families (713 registered guests)
- 59 NICU staff volunteers
- Wins
 - NICU healthcare providers attended: nurses, nurse practitioners, lactation consultants, physicians, child life therapists, occupational therapists, medical receptionists, guest services representatives, students, and retired staff members
 - Large family turnout
 - Families connected with former healthcare team and other families who share their experience
 - Formerly fragile neonates now thriving children
 - All attendees committed to attending next year



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

From staff: “It was so heartwarming to see all the families in their t-shirts for their kiddos interacting with other families and past providers. It sparked excitement in me to see how these sick babies can turn out!”

“I cannot believe how well he is doing. He coded several times and we thought we would lose him.”

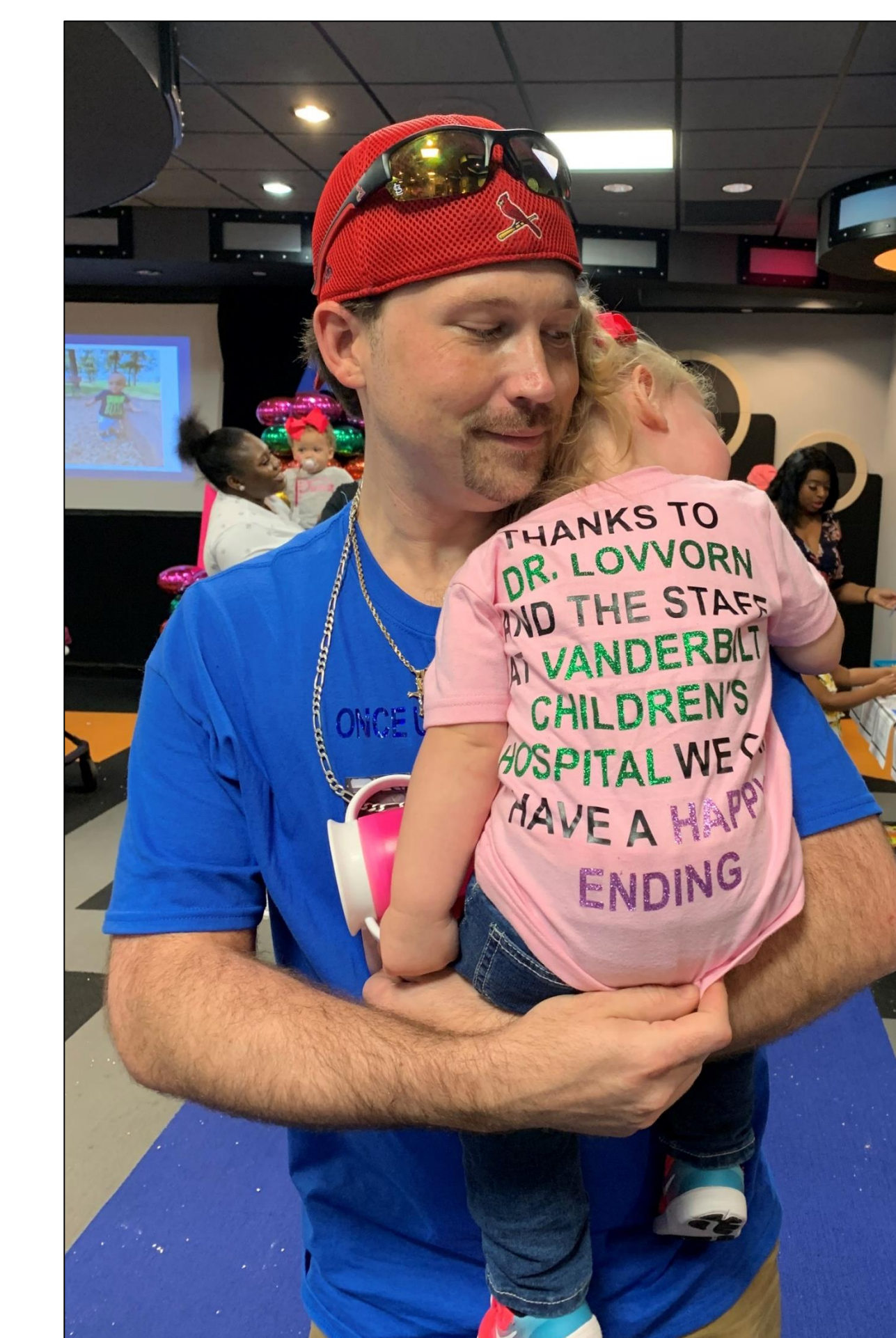
From parents: “She is now 8 months and weighs just under 12 lbs. She was born at 28 weeks and weighed only 2 lbs and 1 oz. I honestly cannot praise the NICU nurses, doctors, lactation team, and volunteers enough... the whole team was amazing from day 1! Special, special, special shout out to all the nurses.”

“It was a wonderful thing you all did today, it was so good to see all the staff, and babies who were there when our babies were in the NICU. Thank you all for the great team work and care of our sweet baby boys who are now 25 lbs each and doing wonderful.”

“It was wonderful to meet other parents and to see some of the same families from our stay. It was truly great to just say thank you to all the wonderful nurses. They didn't just care for Landon, they took care of all us.”

CONCLUSIONS

- Families and staff found NICU Reunion valuable
 - Opportunity to celebrate and demonstrate gratitude
- Potential retention strategy for NICU staff
 - Staff at all years of experience found motivating
 - Team building activity for new staff onboarding
- Fostered relationship between the hospital and the community
 - Through attendees and those who viewed highlights on social media
- Plan to keep as an annual tradition near Neonatal Nurses Day
 - An additional way to highlight the contribution of these specialty nurses



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of the NICU healthcare providers for the care they deliver and their continuous efforts to improve the outcomes for our patients and families which allows reunions to be possible.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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