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FRANCISCO BAY AREA WOMEN'S NEWSPAPER

Feminist Clinic Here Offers Unique Insemination Service

by Claire Willms

A "ground breaking" sperm bank and artificial insemination program to help prospective parents "regardless of their lifestyles" celebrated its grand opening at the Oakland Feminist Women's Health Center on October 5.

Barbara Raboy, co-founder of the sperm bank and public relations director for the center, calls the new program "a breakthrough in Northern California."

According to Raboy, there are only two sperm banks in Southern California and this will be the first in Northern California.

"This is a reproductive freedom of choice program," she said. "The center wants to provide a comfortable environment for treatment, not a sterile white office, and we won't check to make sure you're married."

Since one out of every five couples is considered infertile, the program expects to serve many childless heterosexual couples as well as a number of lesbian women and single straight women who want to have a child without the entanglement of a relationship.

The sperm bank will also store the sperm of men who are faced with sterility or who are planning vasectomies. They can have several specimens frozen to be retrieved if they want a child in the future.

So far, about 15 women, most of whom are lesbian and one of whom is

infertile, have expressed interest in the program.

Raboy anticipates that there will also be some backlash from the community and a few threatening phone calls. "People will say, what are those crazy feminists doing on Pill Hill now," she said.

About the possibility of artificial insemination weakening the nuclear family, Raboy believes that a family can be "an extended family, three women, a black woman and a white woman, or all gay men," and doesn't have to exist inside the traditional framework of marriage.

Over 70 men who want to be donors have already contacted the clinic. They are motivated by "knowing they're helping someone have a child," Raboy said. A nominal \$1-25 fee paid to donors will dissolve the man's legal claim to paternity, order to avoid possible lawsuits.

A sliding-scale fee ranging from \$75-150 pays for a gynecological exam and fertility awareness class. Each insemination will cost an additional \$50.

Public reaction to the sperm bank so far has been a mixture of "curiosity and encouragement," said Raboy. "People say this is really wonderful. Keep doing it."

Raboy feels that there has been a lot of "hype from the media" about "super-duper geniuses" produced from Nobel Prize winners' sperm. "We're not going to be looking for Ph.D's," she said. The center will

give I.Q. tests and will accept donors who are "reasonably intelligent," basing their evaluations on "general conversation."

Raboy also stresses that the sperm bank wants a variety of donors (not just "blue-eyed, blond-haired men"), so that women will be able to find a donor with characteristics that resemble her partner's, or that are close to her own preferences.

If a woman has a specific donor in mind, she can go to the clinic and donate and she can request his sperm.

Otherwise, she can look through the "donor catalog" which will have a page for each donor listing character-

Valley Women's V

FEMINIST SPERM BANK

The first feminist-run sperm bank opened in October as part of Oakland's 10-year-old Feminist Women's Health Center. The aim of the bank is to serve a broader group of women than do traditional sperm banks. Requirements for recipients are broad: good health, a desire to have a child. The v

DALLAS MORNING NEWS 10/10/82

California feminists open sperm bank

By Michael Dorgan

Special to The News

OAKLAND, Calif. — Feminists in Oakland, Calif., have invested in their future by beginning the first feminist-run sperm bank.

Opened last week as the latest program of the 10-year-old Feminist Women's Health Center, the sperm bank will perform the same services as the dozen or so other sperm banks that have been established in the nation. But the center aims at making the services available to a much broader group of women.

"Most sperm banks are geared toward the medical indication of infertility, where you have a woman and a man and the poor couple should have a baby," said Barbara Raboy, assistant director for the center.

"This is the first program that is really geared toward different populations, including lesbians."

The only requirements imposed by the center are that the woman is healthy and wants to have a child, Ms. Raboy said. Her marital status, lifestyle and sexual orientation are not considered.

"We're saying that any kind of family situation is OK, not just the nuclear family," Ms. Raboy said. "It doesn't matter how a child comes into the world, primarily, what's important is that it's wanted.

And that's what this program is about."

Since the sperm bank opened in August, Ms. Raboy said the clinic has received about 300 calls from potential recipients. Only about a third of those women were interested in artificial insemination for medical reasons, while the vast majority were interested for reasons of "lifestyle and sexual preference."

Of the women within the "lifestyle and sexual preference" category, Ms. Raboy said about half were heterosexuals without partners and half were lesbians.

Women who wish to be artificially inseminated are shown a donor category, which shows such things as height, weight, race, eye and hair color, and the occupation of each donor. Just as there are no conditions imposed on who can have access to the sperm bank, neither are there conditions imposed on the reasons for choosing a particular donor.

If a woman selects a donor solely because he is 6-foot-8 or has blue eyes, that's fine. "If a woman is really hooked on blue eyes, she can have blue eyes," Ms. Raboy said.

Insemination is done with fresh sperm if the logistics and timing can be worked out, or with thawed sperm that has been stored in 1cc vials in tanks of liquid nitrogen. The cost to the woman for a medical exam, a "fertility awareness" class, the

insemination visits and a follow-up pregnancy test ranges between \$50 and \$150, determined by her income. The cost of the semen is extra, usually between \$40 and \$50.

Donors at the sperm bank also will represent a broad range of economic, social and racial groups.

"Most donor banks screen medical students and college students (as donors)," Ms. Raboy said. "They're looking for intelligence as a significant factor and they equate intelligence with how much education a person has. We don't necessarily believe that at all. Many of our donors are involved in trade work and have high school degrees. Some of them are Third World, some are gay. They come from different kinds of cultural and economic backgrounds."

Donors can trade their sperm for medical care at the clinic or be paid a nominal amount, usually \$1 to \$25. Most of the more than 200 potential donors who have contacted the clinic are not interested in compensation, Ms. Raboy said.

"They support this program because they are feminists themselves," she said. "They really believe in reproductive freedom for women."

Asked at what point the feminist goal of reproductive freedom for woman will be achieved, Ms. Raboy said she wasn't

sure. Would test tube babies be the next logical step?

"I don't know if I'm prepared to make a comment on that because I don't know how I feel about test tube babies," she said. "I just don't know."

Ms. Raboy anticipates she will be plenty busy in coming months defending the clinic from criticism.

"We expect complaints not on medical procedures, but from those who really feel threatened that women are having these babies and the father is not involved . . . from people who feel threatened by women who are having that kind of freedom."

While there may be complaints regarding the politics or ethics of artificial insemination, particularly as practiced by Oakland feminists, there can be no complaints that it doesn't work. According to statistics collected by the center, more than 300,000 children have been conceived by artificial insemination since World War II.

One of the estimated 15,000 to 20,000 children to be so conceived this year, a cute one-week-old girl named Leila, was presented for press inspection at the opening ceremony for the sperm bank. She is the daughter of the Feminist Women's Health Center director Laura Brown.

JNDAY

October 3, 1982/Oakland, California

Women's center opens sperm bank in Oakland

By Abby Cohn
 Oakland Tribune/Eastbay TODAY

A women's health clinic in Oakland has opened a sperm bank in response to numerous requests from lesbians and other single women who want children, but not through the usual means.

The bank operated by the Oakland Feminist Women's Health Center, 2930 McClure St., got its first two donations last week.

Organizers hope to get enough specimens to begin artificial inseminations in the next few months.

"The impetus came from wanting to have an alternative fertilization program for women," said Barbara Raboy, a clinic administrator. She said the bank will be open to couples experiencing fertility problems, men undergoing vasectomies and single and lesbian women.

"A lot of people want babies but don't want to do it through traditional means," Raboy said. "We're billing it as the unique program in Northern California."

About 15,000 to 20,000 children are born in this country each year through artificial insemination.

Donors at the Oakland bank will be paid on a sliding scale, perhaps from \$1 to \$25, for semen specimens.

Deposits will be limited to ensure variety in the gene pool, Raboy said. Recipients will be charged a fee estimated at \$50 per insemination.

Women wanting to get pregnant will be allowed to shop for their donors by leafing through a detailed catalog that lists everything from a man's eye color to his educational background to his medical history.

"We really plan on getting a cross-cultural catalog," Raboy said, adding that she opposes the idea of restrictive sperm banks, such as the one in the Los Angeles area that gathers deposits from Nobel Prize laureates.

Although several sperm banks operate in Southern California, Raboy said she thinks the Oakland bank is the only one in the Bay Area. In a highly publicized case in 1975, a San Francisco sperm bank went out of business when air leaked into its storage jars and destroyed the specimens.

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Tribune/TODAY photo by Roy H. Williams

Barbara Raboy checks tank containing stored sperm deposits.

Sperm

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Raboy expects no such problems. All sperm samples will be placed in vials and stored in a 35-pound metal tub filled with liquid nitrogen, which keeps the specimens at about 384 degrees below zero.

The sperm clinic consists of a small waiting room with a couch and coffee table, a restroom and a storage area for the tank. Raboy said the equipment cost about \$1,000.

The identities of the donors will remain confidential, Raboy said. All depositors must agree to waive rights to any resulting offspring.

Raboy said recipients will undergo gynecological examinations and take a fertilization course, but she said no attempt will be made to restrict who gets inseminated.

"Who are we to judge?" she asked. Lesbian mothers, she said, are "no different from any other mother."

Raboy said 12 or 15 women already have signed up for insemina-

tions. Most are lesbians, she said.

The idea for the bank started when the non-profit clinic, which offers gynecological exams and family planning services, got repeated inquiries from single and lesbian women who wanted to get pregnant but were unable to find doctors willing to artificially inseminate them.

The clinic already performs occasional inseminations with "fresh" semen, but lacked the supply to handle the demand.

After placing an advertisement last year in a San Francisco women's newspaper about the insemination services, "We got probably 200 calls," Raboy said.

"Believe it or not, it's not very hard" to open a sperm bank, she added.

A spokesman for the state Department of Health Services said Friday he knew of no laws governing sperm banks.

"It's nothing we regulate," said spokesman Pete Weissner.