



# THE FOOTHILLS Sun-Gazette

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## **Families to hold Oct. 14 vigil for infants who died unexpectedly**

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### **A Legacy of Love support group holds event in honor of Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month**

**By Lisa McEwen**

**Special to the Sun-Gazette**

**EXETER — Mothers, fathers, siblings and grandparents. All of these people are affected by the unexpected death of an infant.**

**For families in Tulare County, hope and healing can be found in a support group called A Legacy of Love. The group's annual event honoring their babies will be Sunday, Oct. 14 in Exeter. The event is held every October, which has been designated as Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month since 1988. Jennifer Stimpel, who is vice president of A Legacy of Love, said a candlelight service will be held to honor their babies. "Anyone who has suffered the loss of a baby due to miscarriage, stillbirth, SIDS or any other type of baby loss up to the first year of life is welcome to attend," she said. Families are encouraged to attend together, and they can expect a comfortable and uplifting environment. The evening will feature a guest speaker, music and a reading of babies' names. Family members will have the opportunity to light a candle in their baby's honor.**

**"It is difficult to lose a baby at any stage," Stimpel said. Providing a supportive environment to foster conversation and understanding is important, considering that one in four women will experience the loss of a baby in some way. To that end, A Legacy of Love also meets monthly to offer year-round support. Stimpel said though the group was founded by mothers who had experienced infant and pregnancy loss, couples are now beginning to attend together, which is very helpful for both parents. The group's mission is to "support, comfort and encourage mothers and their family unit during times of pregnancy and infant loss within the first year of life." The group provides an environment of non-judgmental and non-religious views to anyone who desires a place to initiate healing.**

**The group was a lifeline for Stimpel, who joined A Legacy of Love in 2012 after she and her husband Will lost their baby, William, at 21 weeks and 2 days gestation due to a rare pregnancy complication known as Placenta Percreta. This occurs when the placenta invades the uterine wall, endangering the life of both mother and child.**

**"It came to us as a shock, something that we never thought could or would happen to us," she said. "After I lost him, although I had great support from family and friends, I knew that I needed more. I can't imagine where I would be without this group."**

**With three children at home, the Stimpels also had to find a way to explain the loss to Williams' siblings in an age-appropriate way. A book given to them at the hospital helped, and to this day, the family continues to speak openly of William. They celebrate his birthday by visiting his grave, dining out and baking a cake.**

**"We want our living children to know that however brief, their brother's life matters and we will always love and remember him," Stimpel said. "We also ask friends and family to donate blood as a positive way to remember him."**

**A Legacy of Love's website (www.alol.us) offers a variety of resources for parents, family members and friends, from burial resources to book and song references. Knowing what to say to someone who has suffered the loss of an infant is also an important topic, and resources address this on the group's website. Stimpel said the most helpful words are: "I am so sorry this happened to you."**

**Stimpel explained that though the hurt and pain subside with time, most parents fear that their child's life will be forgotten.**

**"If you are there to support in the beginning, continue to be there," she said. "It means the world to me when people remember my son. It might bring tears to my eyes but it warms my heart to know you remember him."**

**In the six years since William's passing, Stimpel, like many other women on the nonprofit's board of directors, has found hope and healing by helping to lead A Legacy of Love. "I feel like helping other people in this way gives a life that our son couldn't live a purpose," she said.**

**Group members also give back to the community, by donating items to the Ronald McDonald House at Valley Children's Hospital and providing meals for families staying there. For more information, go to www.alol.us. How to attend A Legacy of Love candlelight vigil will be held at 5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14 at 1478 B N. Belmont Rd., Exeter. Look for orange traffic cones and balloons to mark the driveway. Monthly support group meetings are held at 6 p.m. the second Friday of every month at Gateway Church, 1100 S. Sowell St., in Visalia. The next meeting is Oct. 12. More information: www.alol.us.**

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