

September  
27, 2021

# OSCEOLA NEWS-GAZETTE

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**St. Cloud**  
Fall Festival  
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**October 8**  
4 p.m. - 10 p.m.  
**October 9**  
10 a.m. - 10 p.m.



**October 10**  
10 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
**Admission:**  
\$10 per person

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## County firefighters tout Safe Haven for Newborns program

By Ken Jackson on Sunday, September 26, 2021



County fire leaders and those from Nemours Hospital and A Safe Haven For Newborns show some of the hospital's donations made to the program. PHOTO/KEN JACKSON

The topic of scared or helpless mothers leaving their babies at the steps of a fire station to be cared for isn't a folk tale. It's real.



Kissimmee, FL 34741

### Weather

82.4 °F  
Mostly Sunny  
68 °F 88 °F  
E. Wind  
10.4mph

TUE WED THU FRI  
11:57 AM Mon Sep 27  
WillyWeather



Osceola County's Fire Rescue and EMS Department works in the framework of a Florida law that says those mothers can, without judgment or prosecution, do that — as long as the baby is left with trained emergency workers and not quietly dropped off on the doorstep.

On Wednesday, Fire Rescue and EMS worked to bring awareness to a lifesaving program for the community's youngest members — newborns who deserve a chance.

A Safe Haven for Newborns, established in 2000 and brought to Osceola County in 2004 is dedicated to saving the lives of newborns from the dangers of abandonment while assisting crisis pregnancies with, and works to eliminate infant abandonment in Florida through education, prevention and community involvement.

Nemours Children's Health was on hand Wednesday to donate supplies newborn babies and mothers would need during those first few weeks of life. Participating Osceola fire stations have a sign that show it is home to a "safe haven", and now through Nemours will have supplies to handle such a critical moment in life.

"This is a program that caught my attention, a beautiful program," said Bethzaida Garcia, Fire/Rescue Public Education Coordinator. "We want to spread awareness about this community issue. This program supports struggling families. Imagine the burden of providing food and caring for another child. We want our community to know we are here to save lives, for the expectant mother making important life decisions, and that we are here for you without rejection or judgment to provide a healthy and safe life for newborns.

Lars White, spokesperson for A Safe Haven for Newborns and former Oviedo fire chief, said 342 newborns had been saved through its partnership with Fire/EMS and hospitals statewide — a direct result of education and awareness like events Wednesday.

"We help oversee Florida Surrendered Infant Law, which allows mothers to surrendered a newborn up to seven



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days of age and remain anonymous," he said.

The newborn is then transported to a local hospital for neonatal evaluation. Through the law, the birth mother can reclaim the child within 30 days.

"The method provides comfort to the mother that her newborn is placed with a loving, well-trained professional," White said. "We refer to this as an act of love."

White said he's seen it in his days with Fire/Rescue, and "On three occasions I saw newborns surrendered to our fire stations. Each time the process worked flawlessly. I'm grateful the mothers had that opportunity."

A Safe Haven for Newborns, a national initiative, offers a 24/7 multilingual help line (877-767-2229) for mothers in crisis, which White said has provided direct assistance to 5,000 women, as well as a student service app that allows high school students a chance to get community service hours needed for advanced diploma programs.

Nemours Children's Health pediatric specialist Dr. Nora Bolanos, who has been in pediatric practice in Kissimmee for over 25 years.

"We've seen the hardship with the pandemic. Nemours is committed to

"Promoting more than medicine, it's about removing obstacles and

giving new and expectant mothers safe, legal options to surrender newborns to designated facilities."

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