



Robin Von Halle, president, Alternative Reproductive Resources | Photo: John R. Boehm

From this week's Focus

Selling conception to Chicago

By Dee Gil October 06, 2008

Eighteen years ago, Robin Von Halle worried her new business idea was so different from anything in the Midwest that customers would reject it. Then a little legislation helped smooth the way.

Ms. Von Halle learned about using donor eggs to conceive children in the early 1990s, when she and her husband had trouble having a second child. Although the Von Halles chose to adopt, she believed there were many infertile women who would choose egg donation.

In her research, she found several companies that matched infertile couples with women willing to sell their eggs. But they were all on the East or West coasts. Infertile women in Chicago tended to turn to their sisters or other female family members for help.

"In the Midwest, people are more conservative," she says.

But state legislation passed just before she opened Chicago-based Alternative Reproductive Resources in 1992 validated her plan. Illinois' Family Building Act requires insurers that cover infertility treatments to pay the medical costs of using donated eggs.

The law made egg donation an accepted medical treatment, Ms. Von Halle says, reducing much of the stigma. And for those with insurance, it cut the cost of using an egg donor by half.

Today Ms. Von Halle, 53, charges \$12,000 for matching parents with a donor, a fee that isn't covered by insurance. (The donor gets \$7,000.) But because of the change in law, insurance often covers the \$10,000 to \$15,000 cost of implanting the fertilized donor eggs into the woman's uterus.

Alternative Reproductive Resources has facilitated 1,500 births so far and has spawned competitors across the Midwest. Ms. Von Halle says the company is profitable but won't release revenue figures.

These days, couples are willing to pay a premium for specific qualities from egg donors, such as high SAT scores, blue eyes and, especially, long legs. Ms. Von Halle gets a few of these requests a year, but she declines them.

She believes it's unethical to custom-make a baby. And she's not waiting for legislation to back her up.

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