

# Health News

## Songs carry a deep meaning

Southington couple hopes to raise awareness of syndrome at music festival

By Jennifer Abel

The Herald Press

Twin-To-Twin Transfusion Syndrome may be the most common illness nobody knows about. The disease, which affects one out of every 15 pairs of identical twins, is caused by a placental abnormality that results in one twin, the "recipient," getting far too much nourishment from the mother, while the other twin, the "donor," gets far too little.

Southington resident Lisa Cote and her husband, Jeff Willson, lost their twin sons to TTTS in 2002.

"In May I found out I was carrying twins," Cote said. "And I was huge! When I was two or three months pregnant I looked like I was in my sixth or seventh month. But everybody said 'Oh, you're carrying twins. That's what happens.'"

Because Cote was over 35 and had a history of miscarriages, her obstetrician sent her to the University of Connecticut Medical Center in Farmington for a Level 2 ultrasound, which shows far more detail than the standard ultrasounds most pregnant women get. That's when her sons' problem was discovered.

"The reason I was so big is because I had too much amniotic fluid ... it's basically baby urine. Ben [her "recipient" son] had a bladder so large it showed up on the ultrasound like a big hole in his body, and Joshua [the "donor"] had almost no bladder at all, so Ben was doing the work for both of them."

After their twins died, Cote and Willson became active in helping to raise money for the Twin-To-Twin Transfusion Syndrome Foundation, first as participants in Conor's Run, a benefit road race, and now as organizers of a music festival in Southington. The couple founded the Twin Angel Foundation, which raises money for victims of the syndrome and will present the Twin

Angel Folk Fest on Sept. 16 at Southington's Camp Sloper.

"We use the money for a lot of things. Helping families, getting the word out about Dr. DeLia ... when you're pregnant, they send you home with a thick

cord for twins with the syndrome ... I had to start undergoing regular amnio reductions. The first day, they took out enough excess amniotic fluid to fill a two-liter Coke bottle!"

Cote underwent DeLia's laser surgery in August. "The Twin-to-Twin Transfusion Syndrome Foundation was wonderful. They paid for us to take the trip to Wisconsin, our hotel rooms, everything. I wouldn't have been able to afford it if they didn't."

Unfortunately, the rough pregnancy had strained Cote's health so badly that DeLia was unable to sever all connections between the boys. Cote continued her regimen of regular amnio reductions until her 26th week of pregnancy, when Ben's heart showed signs of dangerous enlargement. Cote underwent an emergency Caesarian on Sept. 10, 2002.

Joshua, the smaller "donor" twin, lived only nine hours. Ben held on for five weeks.

"He had severe brain damage. And he couldn't live unless he were hooked up to a bunch of tubes. He had so many surgeries ... we made the decision to let him stop fighting. Our friends and family were there with us. We took Ben off the machines. I held him, and we passed him around so everybody else could hold him and say good-bye, and once he was back in my arms he died."

More than a half-dozen musicians are scheduled to play at the festival, including Cote, an accomplished musician herself. Other performers include Christina Thompson, who is half of the folk duo Chris and Meredith Thompson, Number Nine, a local Beatles cover band, and folk-jazz musician Eric Paradine.

Tickets are \$10 in advance or \$15 at the door. To buy tickets or learn more about the Twin Angel Foundation, go to [www.twinangelfoundation.org](http://www.twinangelfoundation.org). To learn more about TTTS, visit [www.tttsfoundation.org](http://www.tttsfoundation.org).



Jennifer Abel/The Herald Press

Lisa Cote, left, and her husband, Jeff Willson, have organized a music festival in Southington to benefit the Twin-To-Twin Transfusion Syndrome Foundation in memory of their twin sons Joshua and Ben.

### TWIN ANGEL FOLK FEST

**What:** A music festival to benefit Twin-To-Twin Transfusion Syndrome. Activities include hiking, giant slide, basketball, skateboard park and barbecue.

**When:** Sept. 16, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Where:** Camp Sloper/YMCA Outdoor Center, Southington

**Why?** Organizers Lisa Cote and Jeff Willson lost their twin sons to the syndrome in 2002 and have been active in fund-raising since.

**Musicians:** Chris Thompson, Eric Paradine, Trilogy, Number 9, The Gallagher Twins, Rich Szulczewski & Steve Casillas

**Tickets:** \$10 per person in advance, \$15 at door.

**Details/registration:** [www.twinangelfoundation.org](http://www.twinangelfoundation.org)

information packet. We want TTTS information included as well," Cote said.

The Twin Angel Folk Fest runs from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

"It will be a full-fledged fair," Cote said, "with craft vendors, food, a giant slide, and lots of good bands."

Cote says the discovery of her sons' condition was mostly a matter of luck. "One of the doctors at UConn had just happened to attend a seminar with Dr. [Julian] DeLia, who invented a form of laser surgery that can fix the umbilical

### TRY THIS MOVE

If you only do one stretch before exercising or physical activity, take a page from the practice of yoga and try the downward dog position. Place your hands flat on the ground in front of you and your feet flat on the ground behind you and raise your hips to the sky until your legs are fully extended. Everything from legs to shoulders to back gets warmed up in a hurry.

### fitness guru

#### Be careful when ordering that salad!

What we eat plays a significant role in the success or failure of our fitness efforts. Working out, of course, is important, but eating right is what allows the results of all that hard work to reach the surface.

It makes sense then that so many health conscious exercisers eat salads. They're low in calories, high in fiber, can be made with a myriad of ingredients, and they're green — always a good sign when choosing healthy foods.

What's nice about eating salad these days is how readily available they've become. Most fast food restaurants have two or three variations to choose from, grocery deli departments have an abundance of pre-packaged salads, and you can even pick up a salad for lunch during your morning coffee run to Starbucks for that mocha light or sugar-free latte.

As good as salads are though, they also have a dark side. You can never assume, "Oh, it's salad. I can eat as much as I like."

Taco Bell, after all, makes a taco salad that has more than 800 calories and 50-plus grams of fat. So while green is usually a good sign, it's not the only way to judge the merit of your salad.

In order for your salad to do what you intend — help you stay lean and healthy — steer clear of salads that are loaded down with fatty, high-calorie ingredients, especially fatty dressings.

Some salad dressings can have as much as 27 grams of fat in only two tablespoons. But honesty, who really measures out two measly tablespoons of dressing onto their salad? A typical serving is likely closer to 1/4 cup.

There are other things you can do to ensure your salad is as nutritious and of course as flavorful as you'd like it to be, including . . .

Adding flavor and zeroing out fat, by trying balsamic vinegar on your salad instead of cream-based dressings.

When making or choosing salads, steer clear of cheese, eggs, bacon bits, croutons, nuts and the like. All add unnecessary fat.

To keep your salad fiber and nutrient rich, select dark green salad greens and red or white cabbage over iceberg lettuce.