

Hunter Wyse's Positively Cool Gift

BY BOB RUCKER



"To me, the NICU is the ideal place for us to direct positive energy. So many of the families who spend time there are younger, and often not as able to give. We've been fortunate to have the support of generous friends who have contributed to Hunter's Fund."

—DON WYSE,
at home with wife Cynthia and Hunter Wyse's twin sister, Morgan.

Visit Don Wyse's Facebook page and you'll see a photo of Don scuba diving, an octopus draped over his head. It's the picture of a man who loves life—not just coral reefs, but mountain ridges, food, business (he's a senior vice president at global financial services company UBS), philosophy, and golf.

You'll also find numerous links to the Hunter Persons Wyse Memorial Fund, with a Facebook page of its own. Go there, click the "Photos" tab, and you'll see an infant in a jungle of high-tech medical equipment. In the foreground stands a recent gift to Cedars-Sinai's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) from Don and Cynthia Wyse, another couple, and their family and friends. It's a neonatal cooling blanket system, the latest development in preventing and minimizing brain damage in babies.

Unfortunately, the baby in the Facebook photo is not the Wyse's son. In 2009, after an anxious 30-week twin gestation period and a delivery complicated by oxygen deprivation—a condition called hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy—Hunter Wyse lived less than 24 hours in the NICU. His twin sister, Morgan, survived, and is today a year and a half old, happy, and healthy. For that, and for the short time they had with their son, Don and Cynthia are very grateful.

Don's perennial optimism makes it hard for him to contain that gratitude. "It was a little daunting at

first when we were trying to think of a fitting tribute for our son," Don says. "We couldn't support a new wing or make a transformative gift. Our first thought was to rebuild the NICU nurses' break room—they did so much for us." Then Charles F. Simmons, Jr., MD, head of Cedars-Sinai's Division of Neonatology, told the Wyse's about the neonatal cooling blanket system—a complex apparatus that combines a warming blanket and various monitors—needed for the NICU.

Based on groundbreaking research into why those who nearly drown in freezing water suffer less brain damage than other oxygen-deprived accident victims, the blanket lowers a sedated baby's body temperature to 92.3 degrees, where it's maintained for 72 hours. The blanket then gradually warms the baby back to normal body temperature under careful monitoring. "With a mild case of hypothermia, the brain's need for oxygen slows various processes that would otherwise damage brain cells," Dr. Simmons explains.

One day in February this year, Don awoke with a new burst of his trademark enthusiasm. It was the day he would see the cooling blanket system installed in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Cedar-Sinai's Maxine Dunitz Children's Health Center. Despite the excitement, he anticipated a somewhat routine visit. The device had only

recently been unpacked, the nurses just trained in its use.

Yet even as the Wyse's were feeding their chihuahuas that morning, doctors wrestled with the complicated birth of a newborn baby boy—potentially another victim of hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy. Shortly after delivery, and before Don arrived, doctors rushed the infant to the new system.

"It was an amazing opportunity to be there and see this baby using the blanket for the first time," says Don, who later learned that the infant appears not to have suffered any of the brain damage that contributed to his son's death.

"For us, the cooling blanket system was the perfect gift," says Don. So perfect, that the Wyse's are supporting the purchase of another. "This was the NICU's only cooling blanket—and one of only a few in Los Angeles," he says. "We started to worry what could happen if it stopped working while a baby was being treated—or if another baby needed it at the same time." So with help from the Wyse family and friends, another cooling blanket system is on its way, albeit on manufacturer's backorder, in part because of the success of the Cedars-Sinai unit.

The commitment continues. In mid-July, Hunter's Fund embarked on a new effort: raising about \$40,000 for the purchase of a cerebral/somatic oximeter, which works with the cooling blanket system to instantly and more

accurately measure an infant's blood gases.

"The oximeter has a very specific application for a small number of kids each year and it costs too much to ever pay for itself in dollars and cents," Don says. "But if it's your child, or a child you know, who needs it, it's invaluable."

In addition to his gifts, Don finds solace in paraphrasing one of his favorite philosophers, Zhuangzi: "There is no such thing as life; no such thing as death—only change."

Change can come quickly. As of July 6, they have a new 8-pound, full-term daughter—Madison Elisabeth—born, of course, at Cedars-Sinai.

"My relationship with my son will always be positive," says Don, who speaks of his son in the present tense and wears a Hunter's Fund golf shirt of his own design. "These days, he's my caddy; I have an ongoing conversation with him while I play. People who don't know me may think I'm a lunatic. But when the putt drops, my buddies will yell, 'Great read, Hunter!'"



If you'd like to know more about Hunter's Fund, visit [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/HunterPersonsWyse) and search for "Hunter Persons Wyse."