

Oh baby! Families raced time, blizzard to hospital

Snowplows, snowmobiles, SUVs helped in safe deliveries

BY LISA M. SCHMELZ
FOR WALWORTH COUNTY SUNDAY

ELKHORN — Babies don't wait for blizzards. Brieana Gerblich-Rorig and Gavin Gustafson are evidence of that. Both are 2011 blizzard babies and proof that not only does it take a village to raise a child, sometimes it takes a village to deliver one.

Brieana is the daughter of Samantha Gerblich and Joel Rorig of Lake Geneva. Five days away from her due date, Gerblich opted to stay at her parents' home in Walworth while Rorig, her fiancé, was at work at Walgreens in Lake Geneva, where he's an assistant manager.

When Gerblich's water broke at 8 p.m. Tuesday, she knew the only way she was going to get to Aurora Lakeland Medical Center in Elkhorn was by ambulance — if even the ambulance could make it there.

"I was scared I was going to have her in the ambulance," Gerblich said Wednesday from her hospital bed. "We had two tow trucks in front of us and police cars behind us the whole way. It was very hectic and crazy."

It was crazy for Rorig, too. He said one of his cashiers predicted he'd be a blizzard daddy.

"It was kind of ironic," he said, smiling at his newborn daughter, "my front cashier said, 'You're going to have the baby tonight in the snowstorm.' I can't believe she was right."

When Rorig got the news that Gerblich was on her way to the hospital by ambulance, he knew his front-wheel drive Pontiac Sunfire would never get him there. He quickly borrowed a friend's sport-utility vehicle and headed out.

"I should have taken someone with me," he said. "But I went alone. That was a mistake. You couldn't see an inch in front of you because the snow was blowing everywhere. But somehow, I made it here."

Actually, blizzard daddy arrived at the



Above, Beth Gustafson of Pell Lake holds her newborn son, Gavin, on Wednesday at Aurora Lakeland Medical Center. Gustafson and her husband, Brandon, got a ride from a neighbor, as well as an unofficial escort from a snowplow truck and two police snowmobiles as they rushed to the hospital for Gavin's birth Wednesday morning. At right, Brieana Gerblich-Rorig sleeps peacefully Wednesday afternoon at Aurora Lakeland. Her mother, Samantha Gerblich, made a 40-minute ambulance ride from Walworth to Elkhorn before Brieana was born at 10:32 p.m. Tuesday.

hospital before blizzard mommy and paced for 30 minutes while Gerblich's ambulance traversed the worst winter roads in years.

Gerblich's fear that she would give birth in the ambulance didn't materialize and she made it to the hospital with enough time to be whisked to labor and delivery.

As the blizzard roared outside, Brieana officially entered the world at 10:32 p.m. Pronounced healthy, she weighed 7 pounds, 12 ounces, and measured 19 inches. Brieana joins her big sister, Victoria, 2, in the family.

But this blizzard would welcome one more local baby.

On 8:20 a.m. Wednesday, Beth Gustafson of Pell Lake told her husband, Brandon, a parts manager for Equipment

Depot, "It's time."

For over an hour, she'd been having contractions every five minutes. There was just one problem.

"Our street was covered in about 2 feet of snow," explained Gustafson from her hospital room two doors down from Gerblich. "It hadn't been plowed yet."

But, a neighbor trudged through what seemed like a mountain of snow to flag down a plow truck on a nearby street. With the plow truck successfully flagged, another neighbor with a four-wheel drive pickup drove the Gustafsons to Aurora Lakeland Medical Center.

For nearly a mile, the unknown plow-truck driver cleared a path for the Gustafsons from their home to U.S. Highway 12. Once on highway 12, the Gustafsons lucked out to get behind



another plow truck and two police officers on snowmobiles.

Even with that unrequested but much-needed police and plow escort, Beth wasn't reveling in the story-value of her third child's delivery.

"I was swearing like a trucker," she recalled, laughing. "I thought I was going to get to the hospital in time for pain medication, which I've never had, but nope."

What is normally a 15-minute drive took the Gustafsons 40 minutes, but they made it without this becoming a "baby-born-in-truck-during-blizzard" story.

When Gavin Gustafson was born at 9:28 a.m., at 8 pounds, 8 ounces and 20 inches long, the blizzard warning was still in effect and few cars were braving the roads.

Gavin's paternal grandmother, Kathy Gustafson of Round Lake, Ill., thinks her newest grandchild is absolutely perfect. But she thinks his parents missed out on the perfect naming opportunity.

"We told them they should name him Stormy," she said.

Perhaps Gavin's big sisters, Lexi, 4, and Evelyn, 3, will use it as his nickname.

Snow day proves hectic for plowing, patrolling the roads

BY MARGARET PLEVAK
STAFF WRITER

DELAVAN — The National Weather Service dubbed Wednesday's storm the Groundhog Blizzard of 2011, and it might just take at least six more weeks of winter for the piles of snow it left behind to diminish.

Denny VanCleve, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service office based in Dousman, said the track of the storm — moving from southwest to northeast — and the effect of Lake Michigan meant snow totals ranged from reports of 8 inches in Waukesha to up to 2 feet in eastern Racine and Kenosha counties.

In Walworth County, amounts were highest in the southeast-

ern half of the county and lowest in the northwest.

"You'll see about a foot or 13 to 14 inches, up to 15 to 18 inches in the far southeast of the county, and probably about 10 inches in the northwest," VanCleve said.

He noted that weather service records placed the blizzard in the top five heaviest snowstorms in southeastern Wisconsin, at least according to snow totals for Milwaukee and Madison — the areas where records go back the furthest.

The snow closed area schools and most area businesses, but things were busy Wednesday for Prairie Tree Landscape Center along Wisconsin Highway 12 in Abells Corners, where Steve O'Laughlin, superintendent of snowplowing, responded to at

least a dozen calls.

"Business was great," he said. "We got calls from pretty much everywhere that wasn't a major highway, where drivers attempted to head out, but in smaller cars, weren't making it very far."

Additionally that day, O'Laughlin plowed about 16 of Prairie Tree's major accounts, including Frank's County Markets in Elkhorn and East Troy.

"Both stores were still open and for some reason, people were still coming in," he said.

Capt. Scott McClory, patrol division commander for the Walworth County Sheriff's Office, said the county's highway patrol responded to about 200 calls for service in the 24-hour period of the snow emer-

gency. Most of the calls involved runoffs, cars stranded in the roadway or snowdrifts, vehicles that ran out of gas or crashed.

"I was a bit surprised that so many people were on the roads with the amount of advanced coverage the storm had. The governor had declared a state of emergency and everyone was advised to stay off of the roads unless absolutely necessary," McClory said in an e-mail response to questions.

He noted deputies accompanied members of the National Guard unit in Elkhorn on calls Wednesday. He also credited the village of Walworth, whose police officers used snowmobiles to rescue drivers stranded along Wisconsin Highway 14, which was shut down for a time during the storm.



TERRY MEYER/STAFF
An employee shovels snow off the roof at Popeye's on Lake Geneva in downtown Lake Geneva on Thursday.