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Fund-raiser to benefit sick Villa Park infant

Dinner planned for Sunday for girl with 2 damaged kidneys

BY KATHRYN GRONDIN
Daily Herald Staff Writer

Relatives call Mia Clements their little angel, a miracle baby.

The infant was born two months early last November with nonfunctioning kidneys. Complications forced doctors to induce labor early.

At birth, Mia, the daughter of Frank and Georgi Clements of Villa Park, weighed just 3 pounds 2 ounces. Now she's about 10 pounds.

Her situation is "extremely rare," said Rekha Agrawal, a pediatric nephrology specialist at Loyola Medical Center.

Newborns with some level of kidney failure because of underdeveloped organs are not that uncommon. But in Mia's case, both kidneys were damaged because of bilateral multicystic dysplastic kidney disease, which is unusual, Agrawal said.

Chronic renal failure occurs in 500 people per million, but



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANK CLEMENTS

Mia Clements of Villa Park needs a kidney transplant. Relatives are holding a fund-raiser Sunday to help pay the family's medical expenses.

only 1 to 2 percent are children, Agrawal said.

"She's a pioneer," said Cheryl Russo, Mia's great aunt. "Everybody's watching. Every breath she takes ... is unreal."

Mia has already undergone several surgeries in her young life and spent her first three months at Loyola. She's on dialysis 15 hours a day and eats through a feeding tube. A

common cold can, and recently did, send her to the hospital.

"It was very scary at first," said Georgi Clements, who also has a 2½-year-old son, Frankie. "The doctors couldn't give us answers. When they started dialysis, they weren't even sure it would work. There were so many times we thought we were going to lose her."

Mia needs a kidney transplant; which Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago will perform when she turns 1, if she meets weight criteria. She could have a normal life with a successful transplant, Agrawal said.

The medical bills already are piling up, so friends and relatives have planned fund-raisers, including a pasta dinner Sunday at the Elks Lodge in Elmhurst and a dinner and auction in October.

The transplant alone will cost \$50,000, and Mia may have to take anti-rejection drugs for the rest of her life, great uncle and godfather Si Russo said. Insurance doesn't cover it all.

Her parents "are not the Trumps," he said. "Nobody could shoulder the costs."

Added Cheryl Russo: "I will do anything for my niece. She's the most beautiful baby you've ever seen ... I'm biased, but

If you go

Upcoming fund-raisers for 6-month-old Mia Clements, who needs a transplant:

Pasta dinner

When: 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday

Where: Elks Lodge 1531, 711 St. Charles Road, Elmhurst

Cost: \$5 for adults, \$3 for children

Dinner and auction

When: 5 to 11 p.m. Oct 17

Where: Alessandro's Banquets, 6050 W. Cermak Road, Cicero

Cost: \$20

Details: Call (630) 529-7270 or see www.miraclesformia.com

she is. She's already a miracle just being here."

Mia is said to be very good-natured. Fussing to her is letting out a brief grunt when she's unhappy and wants a change of scenery or food.

"If you saw her," her aunt said, "you would never have a clue there is anything wrong."

Mia only displays attitude if you try to touch her feet, likely from all the needle pricks she's endured, Si Russo said.

Her favorite toy? People.

"If you talk to her, she'll pay complete attention to you. If you sing to her, she doesn't look away," her uncle said.

"She's more interested in what you've got to say than the television or anything else that's going on."