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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Ventura County Medical Center NICU Celebrates 40 Years

(VENTURA, Calif.) – October 2014, marks the 40th anniversary of Ventura County Medical Center’s (VCMC) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Opened in 1974, with six beds, the unit was run by Dr. Jackie Bamman, who wrote and opened the first Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Program in the state. Ventura County Medical Center’s NICU was one of the original units opened in the state of California.

Today the NICU has 30 beds and cares for the most critically ill newborns; some are born prematurely, have birth defects, exposure to HIV, substance abuse, respiratory disease, infections, nutritional problems and surgical care. VCMC’s NICU has advanced state licensing that allows for surgery directly in the NICU, which is rare for most units. They have been CCS-certified since 1990. The smallest baby treated in the NICU weighed 1 pound, 1 ounce. The largest weighed 13 pounds, 3 ounces.

One of the babies treated in the NICU in 2001, was born to Jeanine Clay, a nursing student at the time who had planned to work in the OR. Her first pregnancy, Jeanine went into labor at 24 weeks. Her son Chandon was born two weeks later, 26 weeks into her pregnancy. Normal pregnancies run 40 weeks.

Her baby in the NICU for three months, Jeanine took a year off from school. “And I realized how much I missed that place,” she recalls today. When she did return to nursing school, she knew that she wanted to be a nurse in the VCMC NICU, which is where she’s been for the past dozen years. Mother of two today – 13-year-old Chandon, and his sister Carissa, 8-years-old – Jeanine can relate to the fears of the parents whose children she and her fellow nurses are charged with caring for. “It’s still a very emotional thing for me,” she says. “But I know in my heart I’m meant to be here.”

Under the medical leadership today of Dr. Siamak Safar, and nurse manager Jenny Baarstad, the NICU will receive a special proclamation from the Ventura County Board of Supervisors on October 28th. “This is a special place,” says Baarstad. “And we have a very close knit group, who have a real heart to work with these tiniest of patients.”

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