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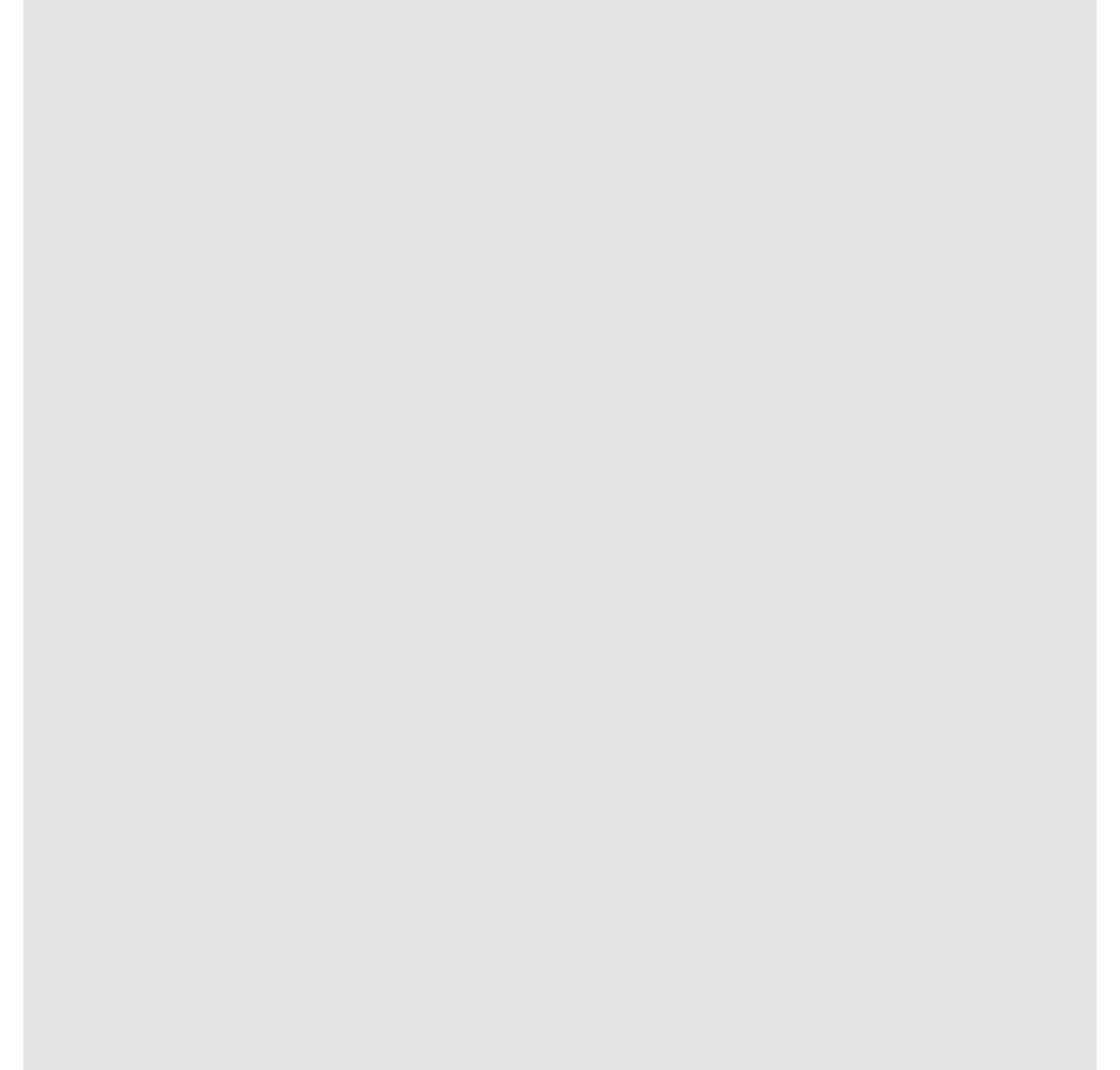
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Medical outreach to Mennonites results in baby manual for new mothers

By DEBORAH HIGHLAND dhighland@bgdailynews.com 14 min ago

Susan Jones

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Dorcas Allen

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A simple black-and-white book about everything baby was 23 years in the making.

Med Center Health's "The Baby Book" is a 65-page how-to guide for new mothers, created after a Mennonite woman in this area asked registered nurse Susan Jones, professor emerita at Western Kentucky University and an employee of the WKU Institute for Rural

Health, to create a new baby guidebook styled after one she had been given in the 1960s.

Jones has worked on health care initiatives in the Mennonite community in southcentral Kentucky for 23 years, building a relationship of mutual trust and respect, she said.

The book would have “never happened had we not had some relationship with the community,” Jones said.

Jones took the book request to Vivian McClellan, the corporate director of education and development at Med Center Health. From there, Dorcas Allen, a registered nurse who works in the neonatal intensive care unit at The Medical Center, began the two-year process of creating the book with the input of the Mennonite community. And while the book was created with the intent for distribution to new Mennonite mothers, the information applies to all new mothers and babies.

“We sat down and agreed that the content was evidence-based for any population but was culturally sensitive to the Mennonite community,” Jones said.

For example, the Mennonites who consulted on the book said they wanted it to be black and white and have very few photos or illustrations. The few illustrations in the book are simple and straightforward.

Allen enjoyed taking part in The Medical Center’s Career Ladder program, which provided her the opportunity to work on the book and required her to visit the Mennonite community.

“We got to go out and meet the people,” Allen said. “We asked them, ‘What do you want in a baby book?’ We got to learn how they wanted the project.

“I think it’s great that The Medical Center allows nurses to have projects that make an impact on the community,” Allen said. “I learned about the Mennonite community. They are hardworking. They are extremely private. They live in a totally different world. It’s awesome just to go into the community. You learn from them. If people understood (each other) you have more respect” of differences.

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Allen doesn't encounter many Mennonite women in labor and delivery because they usually give birth within their own communities unless there is a pregnancy risk factor, she said.

Allen and Jones, with continuous input from Mennonites, created the book and have already begun work on a second edition that will include information on toxoplasmosis, a parasitic infection that humans can get from contact with cats or cat feces and eating raw or undercooked meat. Toxoplasmosis in pregnancy can lead to babies born with brain damage.

Jones said she expects the \$3.20 book to be mailed from women in the local Mennonite community to Mennonites elsewhere.

"I think there's a lot of potential in it to spread to different communities," Allen said.

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