

# Home Away From Home

Mary's House provides expecting and new moms a place to stay

By Janie Fichter  
Times Staff Writer

UNION BRIDGE — The basement of the white brick house with black shutters is a child's paradise.

All kinds of coats - puffy, warm-looking orange ones, rain jackets and windbreakers - hang in a line from the ceiling, next to the heating duct. Dolls, drumsticks, plastic swords - toys by Fisher Price and Little Tykes - are scattered all over the floor.

Luke Sell, 10, aimed a pool stick at the cue ball, trying to get the 13-ball in the corner pocket.

Matthew, 2, and Tessa, 3, sat together, banging on a drum set.

And Jodi and Tim Sell, stood calmly near the basement staircase, watching the children.

"Children have always flocked to her," Tim said about his wife. "It made sense for us to go along with it."

The Sells are the house parents of Mary's House, a place where pregnant women in crisis can come to live, learn parenting skills and get their lives back on track before and after having their children.

Matthew and Tessa, who belong to Brandy Fletcher, are two of those children.

For two years and two months, the Sells have lived at Mary's House and have been role models for five pregnant women dealing with untimely pregnancies.

The Sells, both 41, have room for two girls at a time, and each gets their own room.

The couple, who have three children of their own, provide the basics to the girls and their children,

such as food, clothing and toiletries. The girls are expected to buy their own diapers and wipes. The Sells also make sure the girls get proper health care, and education about birth control is provided through the Carroll County Health Department. And the couple gets the girls involved in church and religious studies.

Many of the Sells resources, such as baby clothes and toys, are given to them. Jodi, a former teacher, said the community has really been generous to Mary's House.

"We never imagined in our wildest dreams that we would be doing this," Jodi said. "But God called us to it."

Danielle, 16, came to Mary's House after she became pregnant at 15. Danielle's mother was also a single mother and was overwhelmed when her daughter became pregnant.

So through Birthright, a pregnancy resource center, Danielle found Mary's House, applied to the program and then came to live with the Sells during her pregnancy. She continued with her education through her pregnancy. Her baby, Jeremy, is now 6 months old, and she's moving back to Frederick County to live with her mother and begin her senior year of high school in the fall.

Bea and Ron Laneve of Woodboro own Mary's House, which



BRENDAN BUSH/STAFF PHOTO

Jodi and Tim Sell have been the house parents at Mary's House in Union Bridge for the last two years.

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Jodi Sell

On being a Mary's House parent, with her husband Tim



Danielle Wahman prepares to take her son Jeremy home for the night. She is finishing high school, planning on going to college, has a job, and is transitioning back to her home in Frederick.

is spread out on a spacious lot in Union Bridge.

One of Ron's hobbies, besides football, has been real estate. He purchased the spacious ranch-style house in 2001. And then, according to his wife Bea, he had an idea.

"One day, he said, 'We have to do something good,'" Bea Laneve said. "We're in the fourth quarter."

Helping young, pregnant mothers seemed like a good idea.

The house got its name from the Bible. According to the story of Jesus' birth, his mother, Mary, was told there was no room at the inn, so she gave birth in the stable outside the inn. So the Laneves decided to give Mary a whole house.

Mary's House is in the process of gaining nonprofit status, according to Bea. The couple have planned to renovate and open a building next to the house, so that the Sells can aid more pregnant women at a time.

The idea of expanding Mary's House excites the Sells, who have planned on living at the house for the rest of their lives. They love when women they helped become good mothers come back and visit. They usually stay for dinner.

The Sells want to continue to watch their extended family grow and help as many pregnant women in crisis as they can.

Jodi is sure that Mary's House isn't even close to reaching its full potential.

"It's going to keep growing," Jodi said. "We love doing this."

## Information

For information on giving to Mary's House, call 410-848-0853