

S. Paula Mary Comforts Infants

BY S. MARY BODDE

Nothing could be more rewarding, S. Paula Mary Russell believes, than holding a preterm infant. For volunteering at Children's Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio, for three hours at a time for the last 12 years, she was awarded a 1,000-hour pin in 2007.

"I come at 6 a.m. when no other volunteers are there," she said. "During the day there are many volunteers who come to hold babies, but that time of the morning there is no one to comfort an awake infant. I just love it!

"Some mornings I can hardly think of driving out to be at Children's by 6 a.m.," she admitted, "but holding one of those tiny infants is priceless."

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experience with music – she sang in the May Festival chorus for 24 years – to use calming the babies by humming or crooning over them. Sometimes she sings a real song and watches the infant react.

"I've learned so much from the nurses," she added. "They know when a preemie holds out his or her hands with fingers splayed apart, the infant is in stress. It's missing the walls of the womb. I remember one baby being so stressed that I put it on my knees, gently wrapped a blanket around it, and suddenly watched all the stress disappear from its face as it moved its arms against the blanket."

Will she continue? "Of course – as long as I can," S. Paula Mary said. And the nurses at Children's Hospital hope to see her for years to come.
