

**“UN-BIRTHDAY PARTY” REMEMBERED THE LIVES OF NEARLY 160 INFANTS AS A PART OF NATIONAL INFANT MORTALITY AWARENESS MONTH**

**The Ceremony Represented the Birthdays that the Deceased Babies Never Celebrated**

**Jose Velez, with the Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep Foundation, Was the Guest Speaker**

Hillsborough County lost 153 babies to infant mortality in 2007 and REACHUP, Inc. honored those babies with an “un-birthday” party on Thursday, September 17<sup>th</sup> at Northeast United Methodist Church (6400 N 15th St. in Tampa). The ceremony featured a candle light vigil and a large blue and pink birthday cake with a memorial black ribbon symbolizing the birthday party the infants didn’t get to celebrate. The cake sat atop a large toy, which represented the playground these infants never had the chance to experience. The guest speaker for the “un-birthday” party was photographer Jose Velez with the Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep Foundation, which offers compassionate, gentle and beautiful photography services to families who have lost their babies. The “Un-birthday” party was a part of REACHUP, Inc.’s activities during Nation Infant Mortality Awareness Month in partnership with the Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County.

Jose Velez with the Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep Foundation and Dr. Deborah Austin, Executive Director of REACHUP, Inc. were both pleased with this powerful event. “It was great to have Jose, because he brings a very different perspective to the loss of a child. He’s capturing the parents very last moments with their deceased child and has to create serenity during a time of grief and pain,” says Austin. REACHUP, Inc., formerly known as Central Hillsborough Healthy Start, is a major advocate for equal healthcare for all throughout the Bay area. The non-profit teaches mothers, fathers, community members and other interested supporters about strategies to combat low birth weight (less than 5.5 pounds) and prematurity (less than 37 weeks).

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