

- Health & Fitness**
- Apartments & Rentals
- Archived Articles
- Arts & Entertainment
- Automotive & Cars
- Business & Stocks
- Calendar of Events
- Classifieds
- Community Focus
- Easy To Love
- Economic Development
- Education
- Employment & Jobs
- Faith & Values
- Family
- Hotels
- Local Directory
- Local Life
- Movies
- Music
- News & Features
- Performing Arts
- Real Estate & Homes
- Restaurants & Dining
- Rewards Card
- Richmond Coupons**
- Sci-Tech
- Shopping
- Sports & Leisure
- Tickets
- Travel & Vacations
- Viewpoints
- Visiting Richmond
- Weather
- Chesterfield Observer
- Herald Progress
- Henrico Citizen
- Soul of Virginia
- WORKMAGAZINE
- RSS** What is RSS?
- About & Contact Us
- Advertise With Us
- Check Your Email
- Daily Email Updates
- Hosting
- ISP
- Jobs & Internships
- PDA
- Questions & Support
- Web Development

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Safe Sleeping

Hayes Hitzeman Foundation partners with CJW and VCU to distribute 'This Side Up' onesies

[Polly Roberts](#)

Richmond.com

Thursday, March 30, 2006

Kyra Oliver Hitzeman couldn't hide her emotion Wednesday morning as she announced the launch of "**This Side Up**," a campaign designed to educate anyone who looks after a baby - whether it's a parent, grandparent or nanny - that babies are at less risk for **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome** if they sleep on their backs.

The announcement was bittersweet for Oliver Hitzeman. In 2002, she and her husband **Ezra** lost their first born child **Oliver "Hayes" Hitzeman** to SIDS when he was four-and-a-half months old. In the days after his death, the Richmond couple founded the [Hayes Hitzeman Foundation](#), the nonprofit organization that helped launch the "This Side Up" campaign.

"All I can think about is my son . . . He's not even here and he's done such a great job," Oliver Hitzeman said.

Since her son's death, Oliver Hitzeman has made it her mission to educate others about SIDS so they don't experience the same heartbreak she and her husband did several years ago.

"All of our hopes and dreams for our baby flashed before us . . . The joy of parenting for the first time turned into the worst nightmare we could ever imagine," she said.

While the Hitzemans found plenty of foundations and groups offering support after their baby's death, they found a lack of SIDS information for expectant parents as well as little research into its causes. SIDS refers to the sudden and unexplained death of an infant under the age of 1. It strikes without warning and no one knows exactly how or why SIDS happens.

In the last year, Oliver Hitzeman has worked to develop educational onesies and T-shirts with the phrase "This Side Up" on the front. The idea is based on the success of the "Back to Sleep" campaign which launched in 1994 and helped reduce the SIDS death rate by 50 percent.

More than 40 parents and babies outfitted in "This Side Up" T-shirts and onesies accompanied Hitzeman as she officially kicked off the campaign.

"It's monumental," she said. "I said yesterday that today is one of the most important moments of my life. It's been my dream to make this happen."

The Hayes Hitzeman Foundation has partnered with **CJW Medical Center** and **VCU Health System**, who will fund the production and distribution of the onesies to the parents of newborns in their hospitals for the next year. In addition, Virginia Hospital Laundry, Inc., VCU's laundry service, has agreed to make a "This Side Up" T-shirt a standard article of clothing in the nine Virginia hospitals it services across the state.



Polly Roberts/Richmond.com

Onesies reading "This Side Up" remind caregivers to place babies on their backs while sleeping.

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"Our hope is that every baby born in Richmond, and [eventually] in Virginia and throughout the country, can be outfitted in these onesies," Oliver Hitzeman said.

In addition to the "This Side Up" slogan on the front of the onesies, the back lists other ways parents can keep their babies safe such as giving them a pacifier at nap and bed time, keeping them out of a grown-up's bed, making sure they sleep on a firm mattress and not smoking around them.

The onesies are also available in Spanish with an expansion to other languages possible in the future. The Hayes Hitzeman Foundation also has met with several hospitals in Tennessee and expects to launch the campaign there in the coming months.

"We welcome any and all hospitals to be involved," Oliver Hitzeman said. "This is all about our babies."

According to the foundation, SIDS is the number one cause of death for infants under 1 year of age in the United States, where it strikes more than 2,500 families annually.

Since its inception, the Hayes Hitzeman Foundation has raised more than \$150,000 and provided grants to the **March of Dimes** and **Commonwealth Parenting Center** so they can provide one-on-one education to parents and parents-to-be. The foundation has also given money to VCU Medical Center to research potential causes of SIDS.

The "This Side Up" campaign helps to open the dialogue about SIDS without scaring parents, Oliver Hitzeman said. Part of the problem with learning about SIDS, she explained, is that many people are simply too afraid to talk about it.

Carol Maeder agreed. She and her two-and-a-half-month-old son **Luke** attended Wednesday's announcement dressed in "This Side Up" attire.

"SIDS is still something people are afraid to talk about because they think then it will happen to them," she said. "More awareness should be made because [the children] are so precious."

- For more information on the "This Side Up" campaign or to purchase an educational onesie, visit www.thissideupcampaign.org.

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