The bedroom is beautifully decorated. A patchwork quilt in shades of blue covers a cherry bed. Fluffy pillows. Soft sheets. The room is lit with lamps at the bedside, and a comfy, wingback chair sits near the window. The Jacuzzi® tub in the bathroom is luxurious and easily big enough for two people. Sound like a five-star hotel? Welcome to Family Beginnings, the natural birth center at Miami Valley Hospital.

If you look just a little closer, you will see that inside the nearby cherry cabinet are all the instruments needed to assist in labor and birth. Stored discreetly in a nearby closet is the oxygen and suction equipment, for use when needed. There’s a birthing ball in the corner. And right next to the bed is a cradle for the new arrival.

Teresa Krummen, RN, MSN, nurse manager of Family Beginnings, says the women who give birth at Family Beginnings love the surroundings and the philosophy behind them. “Patients choose to come here for the natural process. We provide a wonderful service for healthy women with low-risk pregnancies who want to have a natural birth in a home-like setting.”
Family Beginnings

There are many reasons for choosing Family Beginnings, in addition to the cozy living and dining areas and the luxurious bedrooms. First, there are the nurses. Each family receives continuous, one-to-one nursing care throughout their entire labor, delivery and recovery.

“I’ve always been so impressed with the nursing care at Family Beginnings,” says Kim Brandt, mother of seven. Her first three children were born at MVH in the labor and delivery area, and her last four were born at Family Beginnings.

Nurses at Family Beginnings must be dedicated, committed and especially skilled. The nurses are all registered nurses who must live within 30 minutes of the hospital. “They have so much ownership and pride here,” says Krummen. And whenever a child is born at Family Beginnings, bread is baked right on the unit, infusing the rooms with a lovely aroma.

“I just felt like I was sitting at home on my couch with my baby,” remembers Brandt. “I knew the baby would stay with me the whole time, which I really liked.”

Stephen Guy, MD, has been the medical director of Family Beginnings since it opened in 1996, and has seen many families experience birth in this very natural, relaxed place. “The environment in Family Beginnings allows for the complete empowerment that a birth can have on a family,” says Dr. Guy. “The emotional experience this allows is difficult to accomplish in the more traditional labor and delivery unit.”
Leah Stahl, of Dayton, decided to have her first child at Family Beginnings because she wanted a natural birth and the unit looked so home-like. “In fact, it reminded me of my mom’s house,” says Stahl. “They had everything I needed and it was just really relaxed. I liked that all the medical equipment was hidden until I needed it, because that stuff makes me nervous. I got to walk around, take a shower and eat. There was no need for all those rules and restrictions that come with having an IV and a heart monitor.”

Unlike regular labor and delivery units, Family Beginnings doesn’t use an electronic fetal heart monitor, unless the doctor or midwife requests it. “We use a Doppler to assess and monitor the baby’s heart tones,” explains Krummen. “These are low-risk, healthy women, so we do not routinely insert an IV or draw blood, and nothing is strapped on the mom, so she can walk, eat or enjoy that big Jacuzzi® tub.”

And enjoy that tub they do. About 30 percent of all births at Family Beginnings take place in the tubs, with more water births requested every year. “It was great being in the tub – the best part of the whole labor,” says Stahl. “Everything was perfect!”

But what happens when there is difficulty during labor?

“A mother or her baby can be transferred out at any time,” says Krummen. “The high-tech world is right down the hall, and the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit team is on call and will respond in moments if something is wrong with the baby. Although we try really hard not to be like a hospital, we really do have the best of both worlds.”

To learn more about Family Beginnings Birth Center, or Miami Valley Hospital’s other maternity services, call CareFinders at 937-208-BABY (2229).