



INFERTILITY

# Man of your dreams could be merely a test tube away

Hollywood look-alikes are a hit in U.S., where sperm is a commodity

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If your baby looks like Bill Gates, will he make money like Bill Gates? Have you always wanted a child that resembles Antonio Banderas? Tiger Woods? How about a bunch of Bob Sagets?

A Los Angeles-based sperm bank is offering parents-to-be the choice.

California Cryobank, Inc. recently launched a celebrity look-alike feature that allows prospective parents to narrow their donor search to men who resemble their favourite actor, athlete, musician or comedian.

"The most frequently asked question we get in the client services department is, 'What does this donor look like?'" says Scott Brown, communications manager for the cryobank. "So we've done the best we could at answering that question."

Since the celebrity-search function on the company's website was launched two weeks ago, traffic has zoomed from 2,000 to 12,000 hits a day. Brown says requests for information packages have doubled.

Ben Affleck is the most-searched name and the celebrity with the greatest number of look-alikes. There are no matches at all for Brad Pitt or George Clooney.

"These guys are the holy grail. If you have a guy that's not a drop-dead ringer for Pitt or Clooney, you can't say Pitt or Clooney because those names carry serious weight," Brown says.

"We came close - we had one near-miss on a Brad Pitt, but it wasn't quite enough, so we let it go."

There are 500 celebrity names that can be searched, including Clay Aiken for women who want their children to resemble the fey winner of American Idol 2003; Jackie Chan; James Dean; Jay Leno; Jerry Orbach of *Law & Order* fame; 7-foot, 6-inch Houston Rockets centre Yao Ming; and even Jon Gosselin, of *Jon and Kate Plus Eight*. Canadians Wayne Gretzky, Michael J. Fox and Jim Carrey are also on the list.

Brown says donors aren't screened for their resemblance to celebrities. Instead, they undergo rigorous genetic screening and blood work and must provide three generations of family medical history in order to qualify. They also have to have sperm quality and counts in the top 10 per cent to 15 per cent of the population.

Any resemblance to celebrities is serendipitous.

"Plenty of women out there aren't married to Brad Pitt or George Clooney and we want to have options that they and their husbands are comfortable with."

Brown says 60 per cent of the company's business is single moms and lesbian couples. A vial of sperm costs about \$300 (U.S.)

The sperm donor market is different in Canada, where it has been illegal to buy sperm or eggs from individual donors since 2004.

"That might work in California, but for us there's far bigger issues, like getting semen at all," says Kyle Macdonald, business development manager for ReproMed, The Toronto Institute for Reproductive Medicine.

While paying donors for their sperm is illegal in Canada, sperm banks like ReproMed can collect sperm from volunteers and sell it to patients starting at \$300. A simple insemination procedure can be done in a doctor's office at no cost, but more complicated in vitro fertilization procedures cost \$10,000 or more each try.

The screening process to become a sperm donor in Canada takes six or seven months and Macdonald says few men are willing to go through that without being paid.

"It's a big commitment," he says, "most often undertaken by people who have seen the impact that infertility can have on a family."



JO-ANN DODDS/TORONTO STAR

The California Cryobank offers sperm donors that look like celebrities such as Ben Affleck, Antonio Banderas and Nick Jonas.

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