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World Egg Bank using new technology that could help infertile couples

Angela Gonzales

The World Egg Bank received \$1.5 million in financing to build its frozen-egg registry and expand its marketing efforts.

Diane Thomas, president of the Phoenix-based company, formed it in February by merging two of her existing businesses:

X and Y Consulting, which started about 13 years ago, and Cryo Eggs International, which started in 2004.

The bank provides frozen, unfertilized eggs to prospective mothers struggling with infertility. It ships the donated eggs to the women to be fertilized in their own communities.

Dr. Frederick Larsen, an infertility specialist with [Arizona Associates for Reproductive Health](#), said the technology used to freeze human eggs is new and exciting. For years, doctors have been able to freeze embryos, or fertilized eggs, but they only recently have learned how to freeze unfertilized eggs safely.

"There are some real advantages to it," Larsen said.

He said he knows of only a few clinics nationwide that are beginning to dabble in this area, and it is being treated as "an experiment."

Of the \$1.5 million financing package received, \$500,000 is from an undisclosed private equity investor. Home National Bank in Scottsdale is providing a \$1 million loan. Thomas said Home National also will provide financing to those buying frozen eggs from The World Egg Bank.

She said the entire process should cost clients about \$13,000.

Now that Thomas has merged her two companies into World Egg Bank, she hopes to build the registry to help more prospective mothers achieve their goals.

The bank has cleared 300 women to donate eggs and has about 15 eggs in storage. Thomas has sold 400 since she started Cryo Eggs International, and her goal is to have 750 in the bank within three months.

The new company employs eight people, including CEO Marco Messina, who recently left his post as director of technology programs at the Maricopa Community Colleges' Small Business Development Center. Thomas said she plans to double her staff in the next six months.

Thomas knows what a difference egg donors can make. She got into this line of work 14 years ago, when she was looking for a donor to begin her own family. She recruited an egg donor for herself and then started helping other couples find donors.

"I was so passionate about having the ability to cut the painful learning curves in half," she said.

Back then, she worked with fresh egg donors because the technology to freeze eggs was not viable at the time. There are advantages to freezing and banking eggs, so she jumped at the opportunity when the technology became available.

"Recipients no longer have to synchronize cycles with the donor, and the donor can be anywhere in the world," she said.

After having her first son 13 years ago, Thomas started X and Y Consulting and has been helping women find egg donors since then. She also has 8-year-old twin boys, who were born when she was 44, thanks to another fresh egg donor.

In 2004, Thomas formed Cryo Eggs International with the help of two scientists who are considered pioneers in the area of freezing unfertilized eggs without damaging the cells.

Jeffrey Boldt, who serves as scientific director of The World Egg Bank, developed one type of technology to freeze and thaw the eggs. Michael Tucker, who serves as scientific adviser, developed another method. Together, they have combined their methods into the process used today.

"As a woman who did have children with donor eggs, it's hard to find somebody you feel adequately replaces yourself," Thomas said. "The more selection you have, the more comfortable you become with the outcome."

The World Egg Bank recruits women nationwide to donate their eggs and pays them fees based on guidelines established by the American Society of Reproductive Medicine. Thomas said those fees range from \$3,000 to \$5,000, depending on the geographic area of the donor.

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Diana Thomas, CEO and Founder, The World Egg Bank