

# Byron the little battler

## Mum tells how her premature son fought for life

BRUCE MOUNSTER

MOTHERS can feel pretty helpless after giving birth to a premature baby.

Launceston mum Katie Elphinstone said all she could do was sit and watch her 13-week-early son fight for life.

For the first six weeks of his life, alone in a Royal Hobart Hospital intensive care capsule, Byron was locked in a life-and-death struggle.

Ms Elphinstone and her family are keen to share his story this month, which is National Premature Babies Awareness Month.

Byron, now a lively 18-month-old, was yesterday playing with a slim teddy bear which used to be bigger than him.

He weighed 795g at birth and shrank to 740g before he got a hold on life – helped by an amazing team of RHH doctors and nurses.

"You sit by the cot and watch them struggle to get that breath," Ms Elphinstone said.

Byron had three seven-day spells on an oscillator, a high frequency ventilator.

"Byron tried to breathe himself . . . he wore himself



**STRUGGLE:** Little Byron soon after birth.

out, literally . . . you can see them fight though," she said.

It was an interminable one-step-forward-two-steps-back ordeal.

"Usually when you give birth you get to hold your baby . . . I didn't get to hold him for eight days," she said.

"My first hold was less than 10 minutes. That's just how it is."

Holding her son for the first time was an amazing and scary experience.

"I didn't want to hurt him, he was as light as a feather, you could see through his skin," she said.

Ms Elphinstone said she witnessed the death of one premature baby during her

son's 12 weeks in intensive care. Another baby, Toby Nielson, who arrived two weeks after Byron, continues to battle.

Ms Elphinstone, who works with partner Simon Rush at Launceston's Hotel Grand Chancellor, is organising a quiz night at the hotel for Toby and for northern neonatal services.

She said Byron's motor skills development was about six weeks behind normal and he faced tests soon to find out if oxygen deprivation had caused other damage.

"We are so very lucky and blessed that we got through it," she said.

Quiz night is November 19. Details on 0407 404 984.



**REASON TO SMILE:** Katie Elphinstone with son Byron, who was born premature 18 months ago. Picture: ROSS MARSDEN

### QUICK NEWS

#### Respite centre

A NEW purpose-built dementia respite centre has officially opened on Hobart's Eastern Shore. The new John Tooth Dementia Respite Centre in Bounty St is part of the wider Presbyterian Care aged care facility in Warrane.

#### Revolution refurbish

A REFURBISHED multi-purpose hall, classrooms, walkways and outdoor learning areas were officially opened at Blackmans Bay Primary School yesterday. The school received \$2.6 million under the Building the Education Revolution program.

#### Convict records

UNIQUE convict records from the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office go on display in Launceston on Tuesday. Education and Skills Minister Lin Thorp said the display would include five original convict registers for men and women in northern Tasmania and a Bible used by convicts.

#### Memorial restoration

A \$4450 Federal Government grant will help restoration of the Claremont War Memorial and enable the Royal Australian Air Force Association and the Claremont Returned Servicemen's League to install a memorial cairn. The cairn will be dedicated to all Tasmanians who enlisted in the Australian Flying Corps and the RAAF.