

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **Sioux Falls Argus Leader**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Close this window](#)

Web site offers chance to meet and gain insight
JILL CALLISON
jcalliso@argusleader.com

Wendy Kramer started the Donor Sibling Registry hoping to connect her son, Ryan, with children conceived by the same sperm donor.

In the ensuing three years, the registry has attracted more than 6,600 people, and more than 2,500 have been matched with siblings or the actual sperm donor.

But Ryan isn't one of those 2,500.

"There's the irony of the story," Kramer said. "Ryan waits on the site to meet half-siblings just like thousands of other people."

Kramer, a divorced accountant who lives in the Denver suburb of Nederland, Colo., never expected to become an activist in the area of reproductive rights.

But as the Donor Sibling Registry began taking up more of her time, and as Ryan had two "near misses" in meeting half-siblings, Kramer has begun speaking out on changes she would like to see in the industry.

Kramer said she agrees with Arthur Caplan, a University of Pennsylvania bioethicist, who said the sperm bank field exists "somewhere between the Wild West and chaos, with no regulations regarding privacy or screening for noninfectious diseases.

"The doctors don't want regulations. The couples who want the treatments don't want regulations. And politicians don't want to go in and regulate because it puts them right smack in the middle of discussions of things like embryos," he told The Associated Press

Kramer criticized the way sperm banks keep track of births through donor insemination, saying some sperm banks have updated files through her Web site.

"There's no accurate record-keeping," she said. "If sperm banks tell you they know, that's not the truth. I'm not laying blame on sperm banks, I'm laying the responsibility on the whole industry."

Dr. Cappy Rothman, founder of a California sperm bank, said the industry is highly regulated.

Cryogenic Laboratories Inc., of Roseville, Minn., the sperm bank used by Keith and Sherry Forsberg, Beth Ager and Mike Persson, and Kristie Spalding, did not return repeated telephone calls.

Because of South Dakota's small population, the chance a sperm bank will open in this state is unlikely, said Dr. Keith Hansen, reproductive endocrinologist with Sioux Valley Clinic-ObGyn, Ltd.

"Most genetic studies suggest you want to have a minimum of a million people in an area before you actually open a sperm bank," he said. "The reason is to reduce the chances of a brother marrying a sister."

And while it is permissible to donate sperm in South Dakota, egg donation is barred, Hansen said.

Sperm banks have established rigid criteria for potential donors, including physical examinations and

in-depth family histories. Initial donations are cryo-preserved - or frozen - for six months for additional HIV testing of the donor. Most donor sperm is cryo-preserved for a maximum of 10 years, Hansen said.

But sometimes donors contribute longer than that, or the sperm continues to be used past that recommended period, Kramer said.

Donor 1047, used by the Forsbergs, Ager and Persson, and Spalding, was first chosen by Spalding in 1987 and used by Ager as recently as 2002.

Other problems with sperm banks include poor recording- keeping in the number of live births per donor, Kramer said.

The American Society of Reproductive Medicine recommends a limit of 25 births in a population of 800,000. But Kramer knows of five teenagers from three different families in Denver, all conceived by the same donor sperm from one clinic. The teenagers live an hour from each other.

Kramer also received an e-mail Aug. 19 from a Donor Sibling Registry member in Virginia who said her group now includes 43 children.

"That's 43 kids, and they're still selling the sperm, and there are actually women pregnant," Kramer said. "For me, that's so irresponsible."

The United Kingdom has abolished anonymous sperm donation, contending it isn't in a child's best interest to bring it into the world with no way of knowing half its genetic history, Kramer said.

"I'm not saying that's what we should do, but let's take a look at it," she said.

Published: September 10, 2006 2:55AM
