

Soap Star Michelle Stafford Expecting



Michelle Stafford
Matt Sayles/AP

By Mark Dagostino

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Thanks to the help of a surrogate, *The Young and the Restless* star Michelle Stafford is expecting her first child this December.

Stafford, 43, who has won two Emmys for her role as scheming Phyllis Summers on the CBS daytime drama, tells PEOPLE that she relied on a surrogate after struggling through fertility treatments and surgeries.

"After a three-year journey through hell, I'm elated, ecstatic and feel ultimately lucky to be able to announce I'm expecting my own child via surrogate in December," Stafford says in a statement.

She also confirms that she's expecting a girl.

Stafford, who is single, tried artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization and also looked into adopting after deciding to start a family on her own. Four surgeries and three egg retrievals later, she finally arrived at the surrogate option. "I never wavered in my desire to be a mother," she says. "But I did waiver on aspects of the process. It was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life."

The actress, who worked with Los Angeles-based IVF specialist Dr. Buylos and the surrogate agency Fertility Miracles, plans to be in the delivery room when her daughter is born in December. In the meantime, she's already looking forward to a baby shower at the home of pal Kirstie Alley – and readjusting her take on the dating world.

"This entire process has been very, very difficult to do on my own," Stafford says, "and has made me realize the importance and reason for a partner."

"Dating men and telling them I'm expecting in December is a little different," she adds. "I know I just need to find someone who wants the same things as I do."