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## Home for the holidays

Posted by [Linda S. Mah | Gazette](#) November 21, 2007 08:02AMCategories: [Breaking News](#), [Top Photos](#)

Mark Bugnaski / Gazette

The Johnson brothers enjoy eating cake after adoption proceedings at Kalamazoo County Probate Court. Jacob, 7, and Derek, 9, with red gift bags at their feet, are the newest members to join the Johnson family. Ellen and James Johnson have adopted five sons, from left to right, Tyree, 11, Jacob, 7, Derek, 9, Jamal, 11, and Tyrone, 11.

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Some people go home for the holidays.

On Tuesday, Derek and Jacob Johnson, 9 and 7 year old siblings, got a home for the holidays.

They were adopted by Portage residents Ellen and James Johnson, who knew they wanted to take the boys into their home a week after they began serving as their foster parents.

Derek and Jacob's adoption was part of the National Adoption Day festivities at Kalamazoo County Probate Court, where six families adopted nine children. Michigan Supreme Court Justice Robert P. Young Jr., helped preside over the adoptions. Young said more than 220 adoptions in 33 counties were planned for the day.

Derek and Jacob, which are their adopted names, were in the foster care system for about 18 months because of neglect, said Colleen Cachero, an adoption worker with Kalamazoo County Department of Human Services.

They were lucky enough to be placed with the Johnson's, who knew almost immediately that they wanted the brothers to join their family, which includes five adult biological children -- four daughters and a son, and three other adopted boys, twins Tyree and Tyrone and Jamal, who are all 11.

Julie Urbanski and Colleen Cachero of Kalamazoo County Department of Human Services endorsed the adoption.

"(The Johnsons) have an amazing ability to turn troubled, traumatized children into loving children," Urbanski said.

Cachero said the Johnson's adult children were warm, loving and accomplished, and she loved a comment by son James Johnson Jr. who said, "My dad is really good at growing young men into strong men."

The adoption also got a thumbs-up vote from Jamal, who said, "I like them as brothers. They're fun to play with and sometimes they teach us stuff we didn't know."

All five young boys wore perfectly polished shoes, pin-striped suits and conservative ties. And each used a respectful, "Yes, sir" when addressing Chief Kalamazoo Probate Judge Donald R. Halstead, who allowed each to don his judicial robe and hold his gavel for photos after the adoption was completed.

"So much of our time is spent pulling families apart," Halstead said. "It is the highlight of any judge's career to bring families together."

He praised the Johnson's for their commitment to children, saying that in his 27 years as a judge he had never encountered another family that had fostered more than 100 children.

But the Johnsons were low key about their avocation, which they began 15 years ago in Atlanta after their biological children had all left home. "We were wondering, 'What are we going to do now?'" James Johnson said. His supervisor, who was a foster parent, suggested they try foster care.

It was a perfect fit.

Ellen Johnson said each child is different, and her faith as a Jehovah's Witness helps her appreciate those difference and to find the strength to deal with the challenges those create.

"But having the strength of Jehovah, I know that each of the boys will be blessed," she said.

"I like to give kids a nurturing environment and to watch them thrive," said James Johnson, who has been a supervisor for Evergreen Packaging for five years.

And, he joked, he always wanted a basketball team, but his daughters never obliged him. It is a different story now that he has five young sons. "When I come home from work, they're standing outside with a basketball waiting for me."

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More information

- More about children awaiting adoption in Michigan: [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org).
- More about children awaiting adoption in the United States: [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org).
- More on public adoption policies and data: [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs), click on "adoption."

-- Michigan Department of Human Services

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