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21 Calhoun County kids adopted in public ceremony

Judge: 'This is the only happy thing that happens in a courtroom'

Trace Christenson
The Enquirer

MARSHALL — Crystal Smith left the courtroom Tuesday with a blue balloon and a new family.

The 5-year-old from Battle Creek was one of 21 Calhoun County children who were adopted in a public ceremony as part of Michigan Adoption Day.

Thirty-three counties held ceremonies, most on Tuesday, and made nearly 260 adoptions final, according to Supreme Court Justice Stephen Markham, who attended the ceremony in the county building for the fifth year.

"This is the only happy thing that happens in a courtroom," Retired Probate Court Judge John Brundage said. "Adoption is a time that is a blessing for the family."

Todd and Shirley Smith already have children and grandchildren but still decided to adopt Crystal, their niece, after her mother lost custody.

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Darlene and James Anthony and their newly adopted daughter, Viviana, 2, applaud another adoption Tuesday.

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"We just wanted to adopt her because we fell in love with her," Todd Smith said.

"We chose to do it in the public ceremony so she would have knowledge about it," he said.

"And because this is a such a big, special day for her," Shirley Smith said.

Most adoptions are held in private, but Markham said the idea of Adoption Day is to encourage people to consider providing foster care for children and becoming adoptive parents.

Michigan has about 6,200 children whose birth parents' rights have been terminated. Statewide, 93 percent of adoptions in Michigan are by relatives or foster parents.

Mike and Deb Funk of Battle Creek adopted their 9-year-old son, Billy, in July 2005 and a second son, Devon, 8, on Tuesday. They hope to add a foster daughter, Sierra, 11 months, as a permanent member of the family.

"We started as foster parents to start our family," Deb Funk said. "We are incredibly pleased with the outcome."

Each family was called to the front and either Circuit Judge Gary Reed or Circuit Judge Conrad Sindt, sitting as family court judges, approved the adoption before applause from the crowd, lots of pictures and presentation of several gifts.

When the Funks were through, Devon walked down the line of judges and several other dignitaries, dispensing hugs to all.

"He's our showboat," Deb Funk said. "It was cool to see all the other families, and to celebrate."



Trace Christenson/The Enquirer

Calhoun County Commissioner Greg Moore gives 5-year-old Crystal Smith a balloon after the Michigan Adoption Day ceremonies on Tuesday.

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Devon Funk, 8, hugs Supreme Court Justice Stephen Markham after the adoption of his new brother, Billy, 9, during the annual Michigan Adoption Day ceremony. The boys' parents, Mike and Deb Funk of Battle Creek, wait for Devon.

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James and Darlene Anthony of Marshall sat in the front row and were the first to have their adoption approved.

Joining them were daughters Veronica, 4, and Katherine, 21, as the couple adopted 23-month-old Viviana.

The little girl was just three days old when she became the couple's foster child.

"She has been part of the family," James Anthony said. "And today means she is ours and no one can take her away from us. I no longer have to look over my shoulder that someone is going to come to the door and take her."

Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.



Trace Christenson/The Enquirer

Kala Bailey, 5, who wasn't feeling well, sleeps on the shoulder of her mother, Chelsea Bailey of Chicago, during a Michigan Adoption Day ceremony Tuesday in the Calhoun County Building in Marshall. Chelsea and John Bailey, Kala's great aunt and uncle, adopted Kala and her brother, Mikel, 3.

STORYCHAT

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Comments by: **DSMi** Posted: Wed Nov 21, 2007 10:40 am
Thanks for the uplifting article on adoption and during this season even more so. How wonderful the children will now know love and acceptance. Uniting those with an abundance of love with those who have forsaken being given the chance to love is such a wonderful thing to see.
Best wishes and happy times to all the adopting families and those precious kids.

Comments by: **Jonestowntea** Posted: Wed Nov 21, 2007 10:28 am
I agree, it is very admirable.

Comments by: **mandidee1** Posted: Wed Nov 21, 2007 10:28 am
My heart was warmed when I read this article. I am thankful for each and every family that has added a new member. I am so happy to know that there are people out there who love children unconditionally. Kudos to you all. My husband and I have always dreamed of sibbling for our wonderful son. This article has motivated me to pursue our dream of adoption.

Comments by: **The truth2** Posted: Wed Nov 21, 2007 9:22 am
Very true BC/BS!

Comments by: **bconline** Posted: Wed Nov 21, 2007 7:48 am

My deepest respect to anyone who makes that kind of commitment. Many up for adoption have problems - physical, emotional, psychological, and it takes

one hell of a parent to agree to deal with those unknowns. Many people who have had their parental rights taken away abused their children. Many older children never get adopted as the market for babies is huge as people seek children with no remembrance of their past. It's too bad more people (especially the loud pro-lifers) don't adopt older children as it seems very hypocritical.

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