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[From Clinton County News]

Family grows from two to nine on Adoption Day

By Sue Lounds
Editor

ST. JOHNS — Some people will question Mary Pino's sanity. She said she may question herself from time to time.

In a matter of a few minutes, Pino went from being the mother of one daughter to being the mother of eight – including five daughters and three sons. Six of her newly adopted children are biological siblings. The seventh child, no stranger to the Pino family, is Tawny, now 22. Tawny entered

Pino's life at the age of 13 and has been part of it ever since.

Pino brought Annie, her first daughter, home from the hospital when she was just two days old. She was a foster child at first, but at age two, Pino officially adopted her.

After adopting Annie, Pino continued to take in foster children, as she had done before the adoption. Her foster children were placed by Ingham County. Being a Clinton County assistant prosecutor, Pino couldn't be a foster parent to Clinton County children because her office might be involved in the case.

[Enlarge photo](#)



(Photo by Sue Lounds | LCN)

The Pino family grew to nine during Adoption Day. Pictured with Judge Lisa Sullivan after the adoptions were finalized are (front, from left) Cristian, Adora, Addison and Anna; (back) Juan, David, Tawny, Annie and Mary Pino

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"I've been licensed in Ingham County for more than 20 years," said Pino "When I first became a foster parent, it was not for adoption. I believed it was as a community service."

But things changed for her about two years ago. Pino was talking with a caseworker from the Department of Human Services about a different case when another caseworker said six children from one family had just been picked up. The caseworker said they couldn't find a home to take them all. They asked Pino if she would be willing to take them in.

"I told them I couldn't do that because I handled the case," she said. In less than an hour, the obstacles cleared. Three of the siblings were placed in a foster home in Chesaning, but no home was found for the older three. Ingham County okayed Pino taking in the Clinton County children.

Judge Lisa Sullivan transferred the case to another county. That evening, Pino opened her home to three new foster children, two boys and a girl.

As is always the primary goal when children are removed from their home, DHS attempted to reunite the family. But the efforts failed. In October 2004, the youngest boy was transferred from Chesaning to Pino's home. In May 2005, the other two girls were transferred to be with the rest of the family. The parents' rights were terminated in January of this year.

Making the transition from foster parenting the six siblings to being their full-time permanent mother was a big step and a big decision for Pino.

"I never would have done this before," she said. "I don't think I could have handled it when I was younger, but I am different now."

Once the decision to adopt the six siblings was made, Pino decided it was time to adopt Tawny, too.

"We did a permanent foster care agreement when Tawny was 15, but I never actually adopted her until now," Pino said. "Annie has always wanted me to adopt Tawny."

The only benefit Tawny gains from being legally adopted by Pino is the sense of belonging, being part of a real family. But it is something she has wanted for a long time.

"I've waited forever for this," Tawny said of her adoption.

"We are legalizing what has always been," said Pino.

■ Kids

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Pino is a strong believer in the importance of both adoption and foster parenting.

“There are so many children who need foster homes,” she said. “How are we going to make things better for them if we don’t have good foster parents? We need foster homes, good foster homes — homes that will protect kids who are in the court’s care.”

Pino stressed the need for foster parents who will be understanding and flexible and who are willing to bend over backwards, in necessary, for the children in their care.

Pino doesn’t just talk the talk, she walks the walk. Adopting a total of eight speaks volumes of her commitment. And she said she hopes others in the county will see her example and follow it.

“There are so many kids in this county who are waiting to be adopted,” Pino said.

She has done her part to reduce the number of waiting children. Now she is taking one day at a time and preparing for a very big Christmas.

“Even though I thought my house was big,” Pino said, “it isn’t anymore.” That’s probably because David, Anna, Juan, Addison, Cristian and Adora have joined Mary and Annie, permanently.

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