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Adoption ceremony makes forever families official

By ANNE GEGGIS, STAFF WRITER 



Richard Haynes, Lukas Gabriel Kirby, 16 months, adoptee Hunter McDougall Haynes, 13, and Deborah Haynes of Edgewater take part in a special ceremony for National Adoption Awareness Day at Sunset Harbor Yacht Club in Daytona Beach on Friday. (NJ | Sean McNeil)

DAYTONA BEACH -- Hunter Haynes' sixth foster family became the official one Friday that the 13-year-old has found for forever.

Without a delayed plane connection two years ago, he would have landed in a different home entirely. So it seemed meant to be that Hunter James McDougall became Hunter McDougall Haynes in a special adoption ceremony at the Sunset Harbor Yacht Club on Friday.

It was part of a celebration of National Adoption Awareness Day.

"You are forever parents and he is your forever son," said Circuit Judge Hubert Grimes as he filled out the last paperwork.

Deborah Haynes, 50, of Edgewater, replied, "We've felt that way for quite awhile."

Grimes smiled. "Sometimes the law takes time to catch up to that."

The observance is meant to raise awareness about the need for adoptive families to come forward for children needing homes --there are about 50 of them in the district that includes Volusia and Flagler counties. The special proceedings at the Sunset Harbor Yacht Club, at which 12 children were adopted, used dance, speech and song to revel in one of the only court proceedings that makes the love of a mother and father an official act.

"It's Christmas for social workers," said Mark Jones, chief executive officer of the Community Partnership for Children, the area's largest foster care agency.

About the proceedings, Jones told those gathered: "This is one of the most amazing things you're ever going to see."

Marquee Delaphena, 15, seemed stunned that he now bore the name of the family he has known for just a little more than a year.

"When I first met them, I was nervous, but then I started to have fun with them," Marquee said.

Marcia Delaphena, 48, of Palm Coast, said he seemed to fit right in: "It seemed like we knew him a long time."

A judicial decree made these children just like sons and daughters born to their parents. Christie O'Brien, mother of two adopted girls and four of her own children, said there would be bumps along the road.

To both parents and children, she said, "They may drive you crazy at times. They may embarrass you at times . . . But they are your forever family. Treasure them."

For Tina Battista, 29, of Ormond Beach, it seemed like the natural thing to do -- even if adopting Kadi, 2 1/2, and Andrew, 3 1/2, makes her a single mother.

Battista came into their lives when she baby-sat for Kadi, who was then called Kathleen. The girl who now wears her hair in pigtails was not quite 6 months old when no one showed up to claim her at the baby sitter's house. Later, Battista was able to get Kadi's brother out of his grandparents' home.

"When he came, he didn't talk and they thought he was autistic," she said, glancing over at Andrew negotiating for the biggest lollipop possible.

That her new responsibility might put a crimp in her dating life produces a shrug from the lead CT technician in the radiology department of Florida Hospital Memorial Medical Center in Daytona Beach. "If someone does love me, they are going to have to love them, too. If they don't, then they are not right for me."

The ceremony also marked the third month since Tammy and Jarrett Negri first met Justin, who took their name Friday and also decided to have the same middle name as his brother and father, "Joseph."

The Negris had been through fertility treatments and adoption counseling when they were matched to the 7-year-old.

"We knew pretty quickly," Tammy Negri said, smiling.

For others, the road to a forever home has been longer. Hunter, for example, lived with his uncle in New York after his father died and his mother became unable to care for him because of alcoholism, he said.

"It didn't work out because my uncle had different rules," Hunter said. "He wanted me to be a straight-A student."

Of his new life, Hunter said, "I'm very excited."

His new dad, Richard Haynes, 47, a business owner, added, "He's very excited to go to Golden Corral. It's his favorite."

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