

**ADOPTION**

Superior Court Judge Bashor sings the praises of adoption



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Superior Court Judge Gary Bashor doesn't get to do many adoption hearings in his day-to-day work, so he enjoyed the chance to participate in Cowlitz County's annual Adoption Day Celebration on Friday.

The event highlights all foster care adoptions in the past year and usually involves several actual adoption ceremonies. Cowlitz County has been involved in the national event for eight years. Bashor has presided over them since 2011. He loves it.

"There aren't many things we do as judges that are fun and positive for everyone involved," he said.

Bashor, though, also has a personal connection to the event. A double one. He was adopted as an infant and, decades later, he and his wife adopted their son Alex.

He shares the news before each Adoption Day event, because he likes adopted children to see they're not alone. He also hopes that the more people learn about adoption, the more likely they'll consider adoption themselves.

"The more we let people know it's normal, the more likely people will step up to give these kids homes," he said in an interview Tuesday. "Being on both sides of it, it's been a very positive experience."

Bashor learned he was adopted when he was in seventh grade. His parents told him very matter-of-factly, which Bashor says made it just information and not a life-changing revelation. He's heard bits and pieces of information about his birth mother over the years, but has never sought out more details or any type of meeting.

He's content, Bashor said, knowing she couldn't raise him and instead found a couple who could. He likens it to some people who extensively research their genealogy and others who don't pay any attention.

"My family is the family that raised me," he said. "Now, if I needed a bone marrow transplant, maybe I'd change my mind. ... But I had great parents. And that's where I come from as far as I'm concerned."

Bashor says he was probably more open to adopting a child based of his own experience, but it wasn't a driving need or cause. Given their ages when they decided to start a family, adoption just seemed a good option for he and his wife, Lori Sarancik, Bashor said.

Then, fate intervened.

Sarancik struck up a conversation with someone at a speech Bashor was giving. That person knew a woman looking to give her unborn baby up for adoption.

About six weeks later, Bashor and Sarancik were in the delivery room when Alex was born — nearly instant parents, he jokes.

"He's my boy," Bashor said, a broad smile crossing his face whenever he mentions Alex. "It's been wonderful."

The couple send Alex's birth mother occasional updates and pictures. Alex, 11, has never met her. They've told him the basics: His mom was a nice lady who wasn't able to raise him. So far, that's all Alex has wanted to know.

Five members of Alex's soccer team also are adopted. They talk about it matter-of-factly, Bashor said with a smile. That's a societal change from decades ago when adoptions were often hushed up, Bashor said — a change for the better.

"It's not a negative thing or even a strange thing for them. It's kind of interesting," Bashor said. "I never had that."

Bashor would like everyone to see adoption as commonplace as Alex's teammates do. It would be nice to remove any lingering stigma, he said.

Apple co-founder Steve Jobs was adopted, Bashor notes during each Adoption Day. So was Beatles great John Lennon.

Both were able to thrive because they had people willing to take them in and give them stable homes and support, just as his own parents did, Bashor said.

Friday, he quoted a 1969 Graham Nash song before this year's five adoptions began.

"Our house is a very, very fine house/With two cats in the yard. Life used to be so hard,/Now everything is easy 'cause of you."

The song is supposed to be romantic, but Bashor said it's just as good at explaining how adopted children feel when they finally have a home.

Every child, he said, deserves a home and the security that comes from parents and an extended family.

"Most people take that for granted," he said. "But for a child it's so important. ... Foster care is a wonderful thing, and we have some real hero foster families here, but a lot of kids want more. They want to know they're going home to the same people every night. Forever. Think how disconcerting it would be not to know that."

Friday, Bashor beamed through each adoption, congratulating parents and joking with the children. He talked one young boy out of a request to list his legal name as "Pickle" and joked with another about "being stuck with" his brand new parents.

After ever pronouncement, he posed for pictures with the parents, child and often more than a dozen members extended family.

Bashor said he plays just a small role, compared with the birth parents, adopted parents, lawyers and social workers. But he loves every minute of it.

"The other judges are going to have to arm wrestle me to get this job."