

'I'm So Excited to Be a Family Forever'

Officially Family: In a Courtroom Usually Filled With Tragedy, Friday Morning Was Instead Packed With Happy Children and Families

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By Stephanie Schendel



Lewis County Superior Court Judge James Lawler looks on as Grace Vivian Black, 16 months, peeks over the shoulder of her mother, Mary Black. Eric Black holds the couple's adopted son, Johnny, 4, during a celebration of National Adoption Day where the superior court opened its doors to public adoption signings on Friday in Chehalis.



Timothy Pilz, 5, carefully signs his name to adoption documents as his soon-to-be legal father, Zach Pilz, Centralia, laughs at his concentration level on Friday morning at the Lewis County Law and Justice Center in Chehalis. In honor of National Adoption day the Lewis County Superior Court held several adoptions in open court to promote the awareness of foster children.

Lewis County has an average of 140 children living in foster care at any one time. Friday morning, 12 of those children were officially adopted by families as a part of National Adoption Day celebrated in Lewis County Superior Court.

The setting was a courtroom that is usually filled with lawyers, jurors, and individuals whose lives have been ripped apart by tragedy, drug addiction and domestic violence. In contrast, on Friday morning the room was packed with children and families. Everyone was smiling, and the room was decorated with teddy bears and balloons.

“There are a couple of things I do as a superior court judge that are really exciting and positive, like weddings and adoptions,” said Lewis County Superior Court Judge James Lawler.

Usually, he said, his courtroom is filled with negativity — from drugs to divorce, assaults, and sometimes even murders. Most people, he said, leave court sad or angry, because someone ultimately loses.

“Nobody loses today,” Lawler said.

Five-year-Timothy Pilz was one of the children who had their adoptions finalized on Friday.

“I’m so happy to be your dad and I’m so excited to be a family forever,” Timothy’s father, Zach Pilz of Centralia, told him as they sat at the courtroom table before Judge Lawler formalized the adoption. Afterward, Zach gave his son a high five.

Everyone in the courtroom clapped, and Timothy spent several concentrated minutes signing his name on the adoptions papers.

“We felt God wanted us to grow our family this way,” said his mother, Lindsey Pilz.

The Pilz family was one of many that participated in the National Adoption Day, which is nationwide effort to draw attention to the 129,000 foster children waiting for adoption throughout the country, according to a press release from Lewis County Superior Court. In Washington state, there are more than 9,600 child in foster care. Many are available for adoption.

Since 1987, the national number of children in foster care has doubled, while the average time a child remains in foster care has lengthened to nearly three years, according to the release.

Anyone interested in information about becoming a foster parent should contact the Division of Licensing Resources at (360) 807-7081. For those interested in becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for a child, please contact Lewis County Juvenile Court CASA program coordinators at (360) 740-2684 or at 740-2683.