

PEOPLE

Hollywood resident spends retirement caring for foster children



BY BRETT DALY
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One single dad in Hollywood has positively impacted the lives of 10 displaced kids and counting.

Father to a 12-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter, Pete Pazer also began taking in foster children last September, spending his retirement chasing toddlers rather than lounging in a tropical oasis.

Pazer, who worked 30 years for the U.S. Postal Service, decided to start fostering to gain more experience with children in hopes of becoming a teacher. He enrolled in a 10-week program to start the process and met a group of people who he said inspired him to stick with it and become a child advocate.

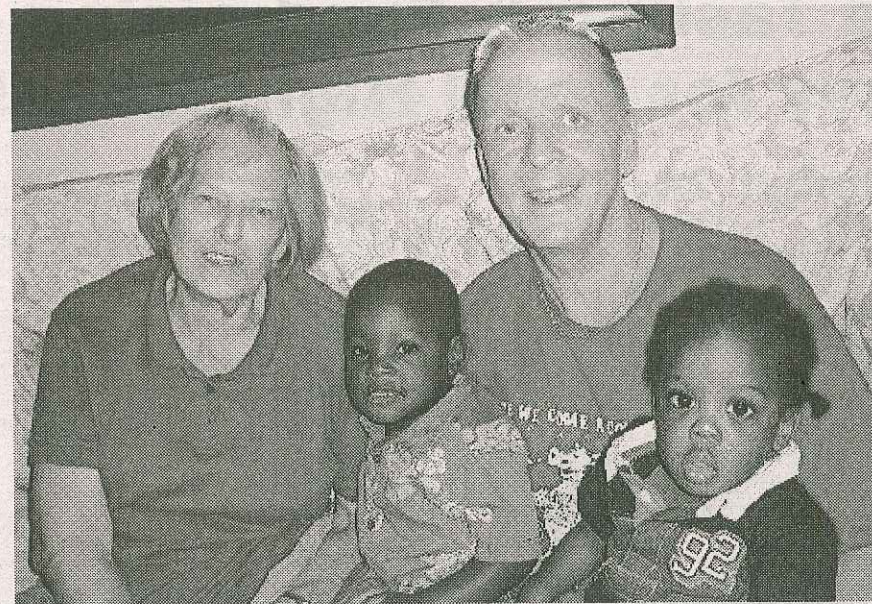
"You love these kids before you even met them," Pazer said. "Once you get involved with children services, the focus shifts from you to the children. It's all about the children."

The 57-year-old originally planned to foster tweens and teens so they would have more in common with his children, but his foster home management agency, Kids in Distress, had an influx of infants and toddlers that needed emergency placement.

"The only requirement at this point is that the kids be able to walk and eat," he said.

Pazer takes in children of parents that the state deems unfit to care for their children and gives them a home until they can be reunited with their family — usually two to three kids at a time for a period ranging from a couple weeks to a month.

"The ultimate goal of fostering is the reunification of families," he said. "But in the short run, I give the children the best of everything: clothes, shelter, food, education, spirituality and activities. I'm very fortunate that I have a great life and that I can do this."



Pazer with two of his foster children, Ty and Amari, and their Nanny Doris.

Pazer said that before a foster child leaves his home he will have taught him or her how to swim (since he has a pool in his backyard) and how to box (since he has a punching bag). He tries to keep the children active and healthy.

In addition to fostering children, Pazer is also the vice president of Broward County Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, which provides assistance and resources to all foster and adoptive parents and children. Its goal is to strengthen foster and adoptive families through support, training and advocacy, according to its Web site. He also works with child advocates at ChildNet, a nonprofit organization created to manage the child welfare system in Broward County whose mission is to protect abused, abandoned and neglected children.

"Pete is one of Broward County's phenomenal foster parents," said Sasheika Eugent, a community and public relations specialist at ChildNet. "He could easily spend his retirement years relaxing or enjoying his favorite hobby, but instead he dedicates his time to caring for foster children. Fostering is one of the most significant contributions one can make

to their community. Pete is making that contribution."

With 1,499 children in the foster care system in South Florida, Pazer wants to ensure that foster care and adoption agencies have the resources they need to provide these children with the loving homes they deserve.

"My mission is advocating for these kids," he said.

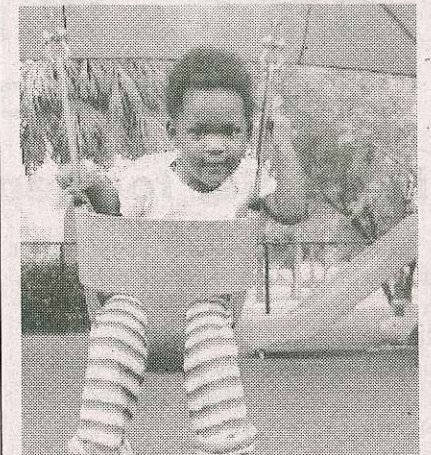
For Pazer, the ultimate experience of fostering comes from providing a stable, safe and loving environment for a child going through a tumultuous experience in his or her young life.

"Seeing that light coming back into their eyes and that smile coming back onto their faces is so powerful," he said. "I want to keep that fire going."

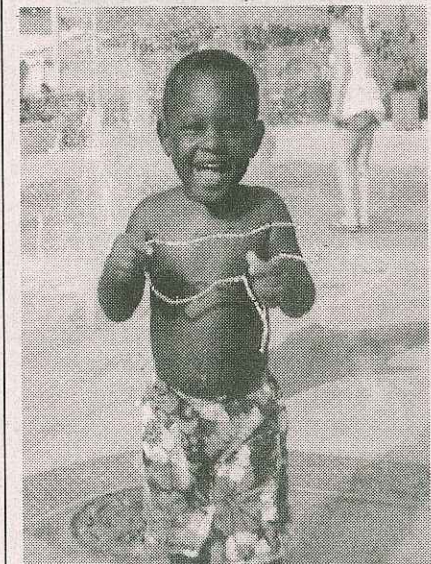
Pazer also reaches out to the parents of his foster children in the hopes of helping them get their lives back on track so that they can regain custody of their



Eighteen-month-old Kevin in Pazer's kitchen.



Ali on the swings in a Hollywood park.



Ty at the Hollywood Beach Water Park.

children. And because he has been so touched with his experiences as a foster father, he has no intention of slowing down.

"I see my house being filled with kids all the time; I'll be doing this for a while. My house will continue to be like Sesame Street."

For more information about foster care, call ChildNet's Recruitment Hotline at 954-414-6001.