

CRESTVIEW
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21 foster kids get forever homes during National Adoption Day event



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Boynton Beach resident Jackson Monjaraz and his daughter Scarlett, 5, sit with 11-month-old Colt who officially become a member of their family during the National Adoption Day event Friday at the Palm Beach County courthouse. Seventeen families finalized the adoptions of their foster children during the ceremony. [DAMON HIGGINS / PALM BEACH POST]



WEST PALM BEACH — Juliana Gaita said she only slept for a few hours before she and her family arrived at the Palm Beach County Courthouse Friday morning.

Awaiting Gaita and her husband, Jackson Monjaraz, was the opportunity to finalize the adoption of the newest member of their family, 11-month-old, Colt.

"I've been crying since last night," said Gaita, of Boynton Beach, as she joined other families celebrating National Adoption Day during a ceremony at the courthouse. "I couldn't sleep. I felt like it was Christmas morning coming (here)."

Nearly a dozen families packed a courtroom as Circuit Judge James Martz presided over the ceremony. Martz was one of four judges finalizing the adoptions of 21 foster children. Before venturing into the courtroom, the families gathered for a pre-event party.

"It's the best day of the year and it always is and it always will be," said Larry Rein, the president and CEO of ChildNet, a nonprofit organization that governs foster care in Palm Beach and Broward counties. "An awful lot of people in this county work very hard every day to care for abused, abandoned and neglected children and today's the day their efforts come to fruition. You see good coming out of a lot of hard work."

About 180 foster children were adopted in Palm Beach County over the past year, but there are many more in need of adoption, Rein said.

For Gaita, an attorney, Friday's ceremony marked her family's third adoption. Gaita said she saw a need for families to take in children through her work as an attorney for children in the foster care system.

She and her husband began fostering children five years ago. The couple has five children in all, including two biological children.

"I think there's such a need for homes and there are children needing homes and families," Gaita said. "There's challenges to it, but it is so much more enriching than it is challenging."

Delray Beach resident Frank Tito and his wife Courtney are looking forward celebrating the holidays with their newly adopted 8-year-old son, Antonio.

It was the couple's second adoption, with the couple caring for their 4-year-old adopted son Hunter since his birth.

"It's harder than I expected it to be," Courtney Tito said of the adoption process. "But just seeing the way the boys have bonded is probably that best thing that I could imagine. It's also a lot more emotional than I thought it would be. But it's going to be an amazing thing in the long run for our family."

Bob Voelker and his wife, Dawn, of Tequesta celebrated the formal adoption of their 15-month-old son, Calvin. The couple began foster care for Calvin when he was born.

"It feels like everything changes, but nothing changes," Bob said. "We've loved and cared for him, he's been part of our family since day one. Having the formality of legal adoption is a sense of relief. But it hasn't changed anything about how we love him."

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