

'A Joy To Have, Give A Home To, Love'



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Gathered for a National Adoption Awareness Month are Betty Huff, Miss Greene County Kristen Gallant, Linda Kelly, Jim Grubbs, Fred and Yvonne Maltzberger, Bessy Ramsey, Sharon and Larry Gaston, Pailine and Ben Montabano, and newly adopted Kaleb Maltzberger.

Family, Friends To Gather With Newly Adopted Member

BY BIANCA MARAIS
SUN INTERN

It is National Adoption Awareness Month and the judges of the 3rd Judicial District invited prospective families to celebrate National Adoption Day on Tuesday. The event, held at the Greene County Courthouse, attracted multiple speakers and symbolized the beginning of a new family.

At the celebration, Yvonne Maltzberger and her husband, Fred,



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From left, the Rev. Charles Hutchins, Miss Greene County Kristen Gallant, Clerk & Master Kay Solomon Armstrong and Judge Douglas T. Jenkins were among those gather to celebrate National Adoption Awareness Month.

ADOPTED

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finalized the adoption of their great grandson, Kaleb, who turned 8 in August.

"He was calling us 'Mamaw' and 'Papaw' when he came, because we are his great grandparents. But as of yesterday he was calling us 'mommy' and 'daddy,'" said Maltzberger. "He is just a precious little boy. He is very polite, very outgoing, never meets a stranger. He has just been a joy for us to have and give a home to and love."

After fighting for custody since April 2015, the new Maltzberger family is complete just in time to celebrate Thanksgiving — or in their case, "Friends-giving."

"I do not have any family here and my husband has some distant cousins," said Maltzberger of her Thanksgiving plans. "We moved up here about 21 years ago. (A) bunch of our friends, they do not have family here either, so we just get together and make our own little family."

The Adoption Day Celebration for the 3rd Judicial District featured several speakers, one of which has a personal connection to the annual acknowledgment of adoption. The 2017 Miss Greene County winner, Kristen Gallant, shared her adoption story.

"Because my platform is adoption with CHANCES: Creating Families Through Adoption, I tell my story a lot," Gallant said. "I was adopted at birth and my papers were finalized six months after I was adopted, so I do not really remember that moment."

Gallant was excited to be a part of the event in Greene County, as this day will mark their "family birthday," as she puts it. That will be treasured forever.

"I am able to have pictures of it and have my parents and grandparents tell me about it, but I think it was wonderful to



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Greene County Circuit Court Clerk's office employee Leanne Johnson celebrates National Adoption Awareness Month on Tuesday.

have this Adoption Day in Greene County. These kids are going to remember this day," said Gallant. "I think that's wonderful that it was made such a big deal of here in Greene County on National Adoption Awareness Month."

Douglas T. Jenkins, chancellor for the 3rd Judicial District that includes Greene County, participated in the event.

Jenkins said that many people with business at the courthouse are there reluctantly. That was not the case Tuesday at the National Adoption Day celebration.

"So many times, people leave the court unhappy. Adoptions are a chance we have to make people happy," Jenkins said. "That's good for the kids, good for the parents and it's good for us here in the courthouse."

Jenkins urged prospective adoptive parents to get involved and learn more about opportunities for adoption.

One useful link is <http://www.nationaladoptionday.org/toolkit/>.

"There are over 100,000 foster kids in Tennessee," Jenkins said.

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services seeks adults interested in adoption, he said.

"You can see what great success stories sometimes come from that," Jenkins said. "All the judges in the 3rd Judicial District have been very supportive of this program, and we're very happy to do our part."

Circuit Court Judge Alex Pearson agreed.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for families to be brought together," Pearson said. "All children deserve a permanent, loving family, and it's wonderful to be a small part of ensuring that happens."

The Rev. Charles A. Hutchins, the former vice president of development and church relations for Holston United Methodist Home for Children and now the director of church relations and estate planning, was also a guest speaker at the event.

The Adoption Day Celebration meant a great deal to Greene County Circuit Court Clerk's office employee Leanne Johnson.

"Adoption gave me a chance for a better life," Johnson wrote in an email. "My birth mother was only 15 at the time she conceived me and my (adoptive) parents had tried for 10 years to have children with no success."

Johnson's adoptive parents worked through Holston Home to process



PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE SUN

The newly complete Maltzberger family poses with Miss Greene County Kristen Gallant. Kaleb, 8, was officially adopted by his great grandparents, Yvonne and Fred Maltzberger, on Tuesday.

her adoption paperwork, which took a little over two years. Finally, after many classes, inspections and the like, they were ready to adopt.

Johnson spent three weeks at a foster home with a couple that she remains in contact with to this day, who adopted a son of their own shortly after Johnson was adopted.

"My mom says that, 'God's timing is always perfect and waiting so long for a baby was totally worth it,'" wrote Johnson. "I am very grateful God chose them to be my parents and place us together."

Johnson is unafraid to share her adoption story and celebrate it.

"National Adoption Day was a reminder that I am loved, worthy, wanted, chosen and adopted," she

wrote.

During Tuesday's celebration, Zaxby's of Greenville provided chicken and meal cards, the Ingles Supermarket on Asheville Highway offered cupcakes,

and the Food City on East Andrew Johnson Highway handed out balloons.

Staff writer Ken Little contributed to this report.

