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30 children welcomed by adoptive parents

Fulton proceedings: Union City man adopts 3 young brothers; 1,400 kids in state ready for permanent homes.

By Paul Donsky
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Sunday, November 16, 2008

Wallace Ponder III stood a bit nervously outside a Fulton County judge's office Saturday morning.

The 43-year-old Union City man was about to take perhaps the biggest step of his life: becoming a dad.

Ponder, who is single, has been foster parent to three siblings for the past year. On Saturday, he made it official: legally, he's now dad to Wallace, 12, Quentin, 10, and Demeco, 8.

After a short proceeding in front of Fulton County Juvenile Court Judge Belinda Edwards, the adoptions were finalized. Ponder took off his glasses and wiped away tears of joy.

"For me, it's just overwhelming," Ponder said.

The adoptions were among several dozen finalized Saturday in Fulton County as part of National Adoption Month. In all, 30 children aged 17 months to 16 years were adopted by 22 families in Fulton on Saturday.

All of the children had been abused or neglected and placed in state custody, said Debra Lookabill, adoption director for the state Division of Family and Children Services. Lookabill said there are 14,000 children in foster care in Georgia and 1,400 children ready for adoption.

"We need families," she said.

Looking around a reception room at the celebrating families, she smiled.

"These children will grow up in loving, nurturing, mentoring families," she said. "It means they will have the stability in their lives they need to grow up."

Maya, all of 17 months, clutched a yellow balloon as her parents Brian and Andrea Couch waited to finalize her adoption.

The Alpharetta couple had been looking to adopt for several years before deciding to become foster parents. Curly haired Maya came into their lives last December, when she was only 7 months old.

"Her first words were mom and dad, and it was to us," said Brian Couch, 31.

Across the room, Joan Walcott beamed as she talked about her new son, Raheem, 6. Walcott is 65, divorced and has seven grown children. Raheem lovingly calls her "granny."

"He keeps me alive," Walcott said. "He keeps me going."



Ponder, the Union City man who adopted three boys on Saturday, said he had a similar experience.

"Once they came into the home, I knew from the first day that they were going to stay there," he said.

His eldest son, Wallace IV, said he's thrilled to be adopted.

"It's a good thing, because now that we're in a safe home, we won't have to be moving around," he said.

Looking at his father, Wallace softened.

"He's a very good dad. It's just a wonderful thing that we've finalized it," he said.

For information about becoming a foster parent and adoption, contact the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services at 1-877-210-5437.

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