

# MIETRO

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## Parents and children share celebration of family in District



JAHN CHIKWENDIU/THE WASHINGTON POST

Celebrating Adoption Day with their mother, Barbara Burrs, are 10-year-old triplets Tyree, center, Tyrese, far left, and Tynethia. More than 30 children participated in the adoption formalization event Saturday in the District.

### Adoption Day recognizes the need and those who respond

BY EMMA BROWN

Fifth-grade teacher Drew Dalton was eating dinner one evening in 2006 when he tuned in to a TV show featuring children in need of parents. When one of Dalton's students — Devon, a shy boy who had spent much of his life in foster care — appeared on the screen, he decided to help.

On Saturday, after more than a year together, the dapper pair officially became father and son in an adoption ceremony at D.C. Superior Court, part of Washington's 23rd annual celebration of Adoption Day.

"At first, it was an impulse," said Dalton, 28, who continues to teach at the school in Prince George's County where he met Devon, who is 15. "Now he's part of the family."

The courthouse's sun-drenched atrium was filled with heartwarming stories as the adoptions of three dozen children were finalized in front of hundreds of family members, social workers and lawyers. It was one of more than 300 events held Saturday across the United States, including in Maryland and Virginia.

"The whole District of Columbia is thankful for every parent who will come forward to adopt one of our children," said Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.).

Barbara and Larry Burrs had already reared five children when a friend asked them to take in the 7-year-old triplets she had been fostering. When the trio walked into the couple's home in 2007, one child tucked his chin into his chest and asked whether Barbara would be his new mother.

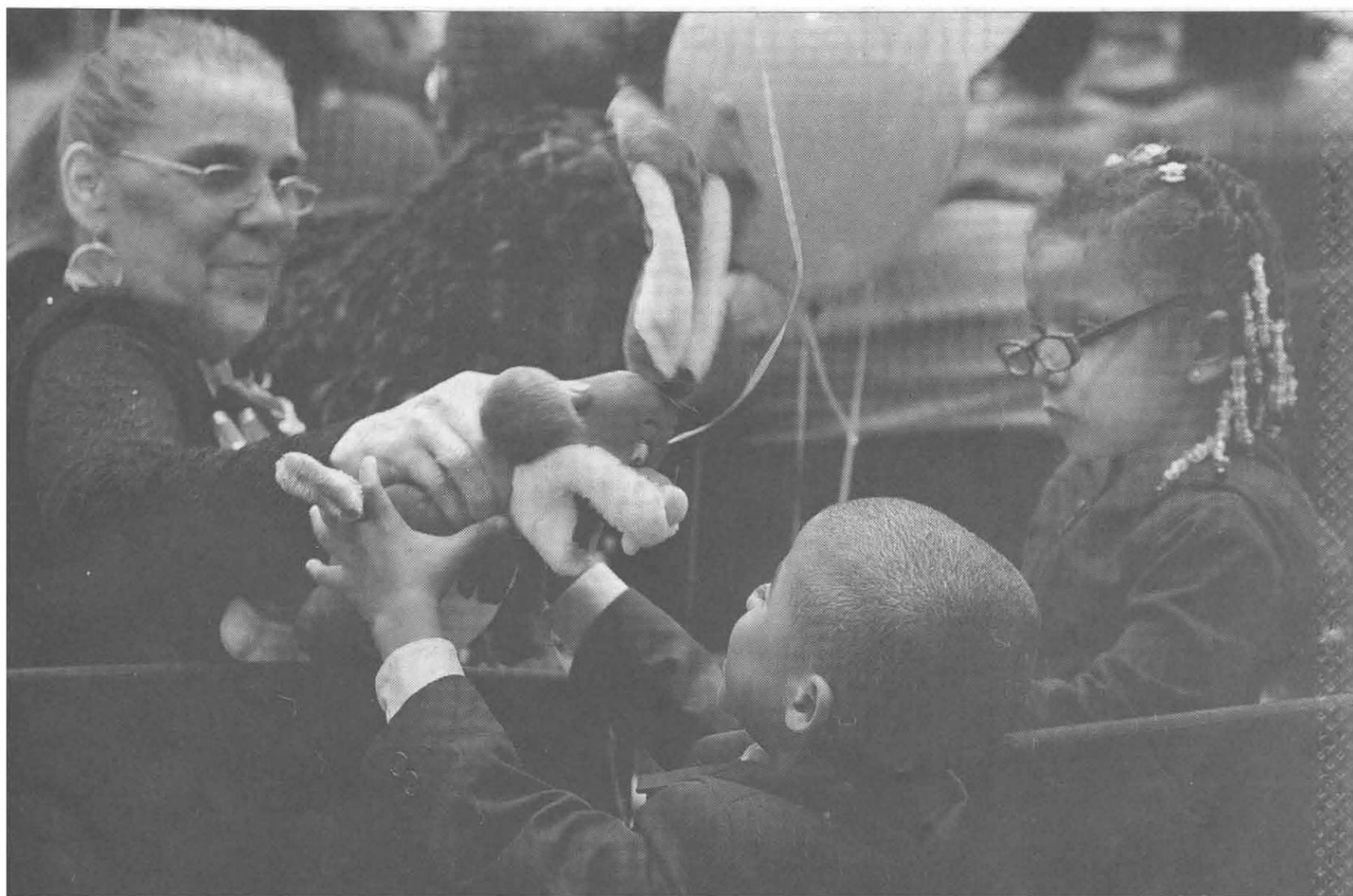
"It was like a marriage proposal," said Barbara Burrs, 62. "I said, 'I do.'"

In fact, Barbara Burrs said she was excited and nervous before Saturday's ceremony.

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PHOTOS BY JAHN CHIKWENDIU/THE WASHINGTON POST

Mary Tyson plays with Jamal Porter, 5, during the District's Adoption Day event. Watching the fun is Tyson's daughter, Shawana, 5. Both of the children have found families through adoption. An additional 260 children in the city are seeking families.

## Families embrace a lifetime commitment

ADOPTION FROM C1

emony, much like couples are before a wedding. "It's real now," she said, smiling at her 10-year-old sons in pinstripe suits and her daughter wearing a lime-green dress. "It's no more just living together — it's a commitment for life."

WRC-TV news anchor Barbara Harrison, who features foster children in a weekly segment, introduced the families before a judge signed paperwork making the adoptions legal.

"It truly feels like a weight is lifted off your shoulders," said Melissa Pledger, 30, who had been a foster parent to 3-year-old Maya for more than two years. Pledger worried until the last moment that the adoption might fall through. "I'm just glad it's over, truly," she said.

Adoption cases are confiden-



Deborah Bell keeps an eye on daughter Jacqueline, 4.

tial by law, and lawyers, social workers and judges said they hoped Saturday's public festivities — with live music, balloons and platters of food — would en-

courage prospective parents to consider adopting locally. This year, 113 of the District's 2,100 foster children have found permanent homes. An additional

260 are seeking families.

"If you can do it, do it," said Superior Court Chief Judge Lee E. Satterfield, an adoptive father of two. "They're the best thing to come into your life."

LaKesia Guinyard's doe-eyed 5-year-old Edward gripped her hand as they waited their turn. Soon after the boy arrived at her home three years ago, Guinyard said, Edward turned to her and called her Mommy. She melted, even though she runs a day care and is rearing nine other youngsters, including godchildren.

"You'd think I would be tired," Guinyard said. "But I just have a soft spot when it comes to children. I feel like I can give. If they don't have it, I can give."

People interested in adopting District children are encouraged to call 202-671-5683 for more information.

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