

Adoption Day scheduled for Nov. 23 in Hattiesburg

November 12, 2015

A mass adoption ceremony is scheduled for Nov. 23 at 11 a.m. in Forrest County Chancery Court in Hattiesburg. Between 25 and 30 foster children are expected to be adopted into forever homes.

Chancellor Dawn Beam, who will preside over the adoptions, looks forward to the ceremony.

“We are so thankful that despite a bad situation, a wonderful miracle has happened,” she said. “Thanksgiving is right around the corner, and Christmas. Can you imagine not having a family to spend the holidays with? We take that for granted. There are lots of children that need somebody to love them, so adoption is about family. Its about that assurance that you have folks that love you through thick and thin.

“Every adoption is special,” Judge Beam said. The ones that provide homes for children who have been in the foster care system for years touch her heart. “In particular, these children who have gone through DHS and have been shuffled here and there and finally find a place of permanency – there is nothing like it.”

The media is invited. The press will have an opportunity to interview adoptive families who are willing to talk and be photographed.

Foster parents Caleb and Abbie Koonce of Jackson also will share their story. They set out to adopt, but discovered the extreme need for foster homes. They signed up with the Department of Human Services.

“The very day we were licensed, we received a call at 2 a.m. about a 4-year-old little boy, who stayed with us for a week,” Abbie Koonce wrote recently in a Pinelake Church publication titled “Foster Care: When God Changed Our Plans.”

“We later got to bring the sweetest little baby girl home from the hospital for three days. It was pretty powerful to bring a newborn baby out of the hospital into the fresh air and sunshine for the very first time! Right after that, we took in a 1- and 2-year-old brother and sister. They’ve been with us for a year now, and they will likely go back home in the spring,” Koonce wrote.

“Foster care has been the most rewarding – and challenging – thing we have ever done,” she said. It’s hard to let go of children that they love. “But we know without a doubt we are following the path that God has put us on, and there is great comfort in that.”

Judge Beam wants to call attention to the tremendous need for foster care, in the hope that others will be inspired to become foster parents.

“Many adopting parents begin as foster parents taking children in after they have been removed from their parents’ custody due to abuse or neglect,” Judge Beam said. “There is a real need for residents to volunteer to be foster parents to care for these children while the Department of Human Services and the Court work with parents in order to allow the safe return of children to their families. In those unfortunate cases where parents are unable to change their behavior and offer a stable home environment, adoptive homes are needed to give permanency to our children.”

November is National Adoption Month. Several chancellors around the state finalize a large group of adoptions with a ceremony and celebration in November.

The Nov. 23 ceremony will mark Judge Beam’s fifth time to preside over a mass adoption. She vividly recalled her first. An elderly woman who was there to finalize an adoption became ill and was unable to come upstairs to the courtroom. An ambulance was waiting to take her to a hospital, but she refused to leave. She insisted on completing the adoption. Judge Beam went downstairs to see her in the courthouse lobby.

The elderly African-American woman had served as a respite home for foster parents. She wanted to adopt an 18-year-old white foster kid who had come into her care. “He had been found in Pearl River County in a dog pen. He had bounced from foster home to foster home. He was aging out of foster care,” Judge Beam recalled.

The young man didn’t know of her plans to adopt him until he was standing with the judge in the courthouse lobby. “He cried. She cried. I wanted to cry,” Judge Beam said. “We signed it there. It was great.”